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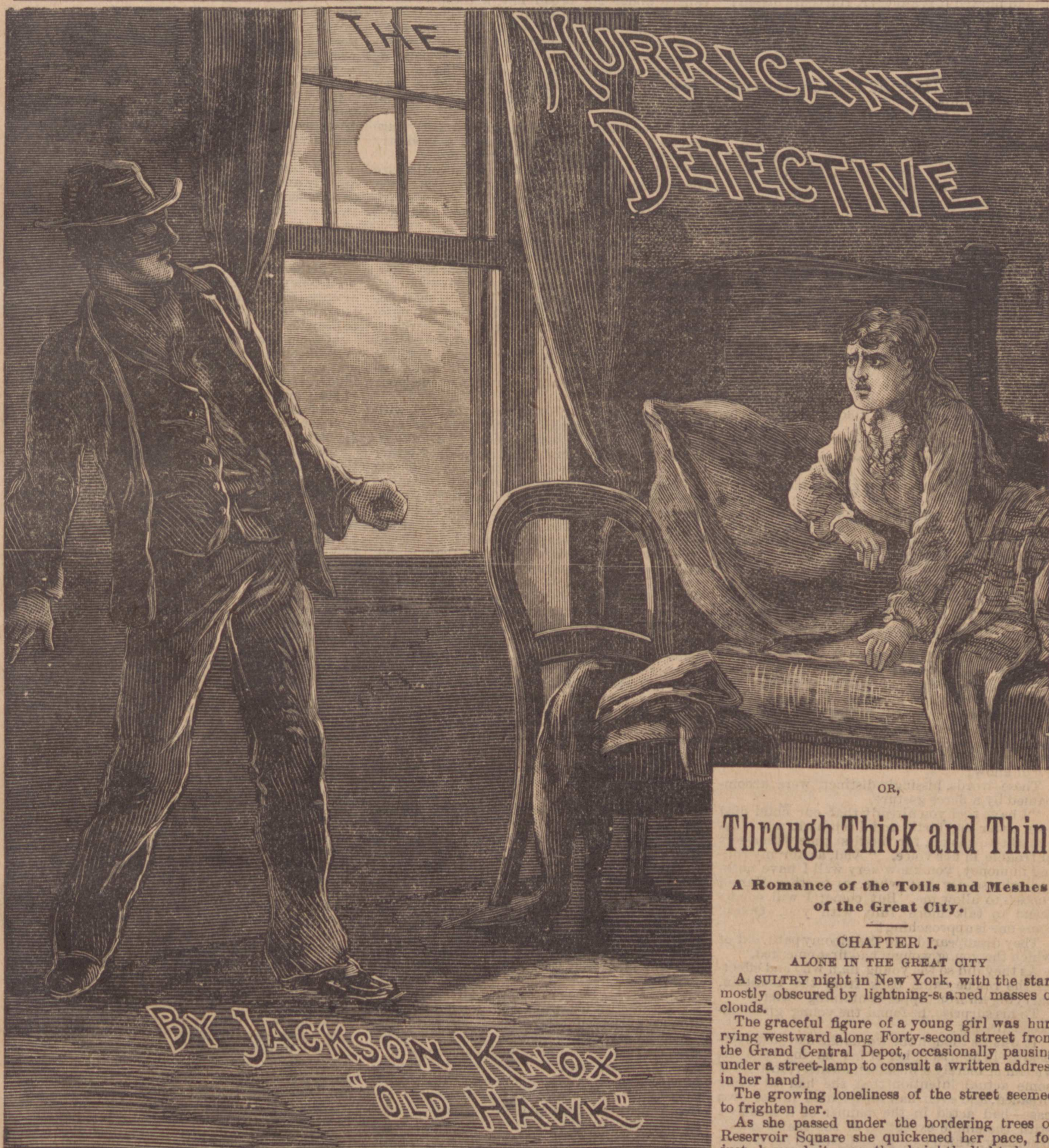
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OR,

Through Thick and Thin.

A Romance of the Tolls and Meshes
of the Great City.

CHAPTER I.

ALONE IN THE GREAT CITY

A SULTRY night in New York, with the stars mostly obscured by lightning-stained masses of clouds.

The graceful figure of a young girl was hurrying westward along Forty-second street from the Grand Central Depot, occasionally pausing under a street-lamp to consult a written address in her hand.

The growing loneliness of the street seemed to frighten her.

As she passed under the bordering trees of Reservoir Square she quickened her pace, for just beyond it was the brightly-lighted and comparatively-thronged Sixth avenue.

Moreover, she had suddenly perceived a coach

SHE HAD BROUGHT HER FACE INTO THE FULL MOONLIGHT, AND THE MAN SHRUNK
AGAINST THE OPPOSITE WALL, GLARING AT HER THROUGH HIS MASK.

drawn up in the shadows near at hand, with two men, who seemed to watch her approach.

A moment later, indeed, they abruptly sprung upon her, one of them clapping his hand over her mouth, while the other assisted in trying to thrust her into the coach.

The girl struggled desperately, though, strangely enough, without making a single outcry.

Even when she had freed her lips, she emitted no sound save a low moan, and continued her resistance in silence.

Being naturally robust, as well as nerved by terror, she was causing her assailants more trouble than they had anticipated.

"Curse it all!" panted one; "maybe it ain't the right gal, after all. Why don't she holler?"

"She ain't of the hollerin' sort," growled the other. "She's the right gal, though. Here we are. In with her now, and drive off!"

But at this juncture a young man, whose attention was fortunately attracted, came rushing to the rescue.

A blow from his stout walking-stick sent the burlier of the ruffians reeling against the wheels, the other was similarly repulsed, and then the terrified, half-fainting girl was in her rescuer's arms.

Then, while still supporting the girl, the young man dropped his stick, and reached around to his hip-pocket with a significant gesture.

This was enough.

"I'm blowed if it ain't Mr. Harcourt hisself!" exclaimed one of the rascals, under his breath.

Followed by his companion he sprung upon the vehicle and drove rapidly away into the night and storm, for the thunder was now crashing overhead.

The entire incident had not occupied more than two minutes.

The young girl was terribly agitated as she hurriedly disengaged herself from her rescuer's support.

"If—if I could only sit down a moment, sir," she murmured. "And then, if I could only have a swallow of water."

With the simple rejoinder, "Wait here, please," he led her to a bench and then hurried toward a drinking-fountain observable under a gaslight about midway across the Park.

Hardly was the girl left alone before she was the witness of a strange little dramatic episode.

The clatter of the vanishing equipage had not yet died away when a man, who had evidently witnessed the attempted abduction from somewhere in the shadow of the north or street wall of the Reservoir, turned into the Park with a rapid step and disappointed air. As he did so, he was abruptly confronted by a young woman—clad very much as our young stranger, especially with regard to her hat—who slipped out of the bowered path in the shadow of the west or Park wall.

"Fool, no less than knave!" exclaimed the latter. "So, Albert Guernsey, you thought to kidnap me, and yet were so idiotic as to direct your hirelings to the wrong girl by mistake!"

"Yes, I did!" growled the man, with an oath. "What became of that girl, anyway? Did she go off with the chap who rescued her?"

"Who knows or cares, since she accidentally cheated you in your designs upon me?" was the contemptuous reply.

"By Heaven, Fanny! I tell you I will yet succeed, unless you pension me with some of the wealth you are rolling in, while I have hardly a shirt to my back," retorted the other, yet more menacingly.

"My wealth! That is good!"

"Well, well, perhaps you would sooner have it generally known that Albert Guernsey, the ex-convict, is your husband—the husband to whom you were secretly married when you were as poor and obscure as he—before your brother suddenly raised you up with him to wealth and position. What have you done with our child? I will know!"

These words, hissing distinct, were accompanied by a fierce gesture.

"I have told you already that our child died soon after its birth, and I repeat it now," declared the woman, for the first time with a sort of trouble in her voice. "And, as for my rolling in money, you know very well I have nothing whatsoever but what my brother Harold chooses to allow me. But come; I will condescend to talk more fully with you. Quick! some one is approaching!"

They disappeared into the gloomy path, out of which the young woman had first emerged.

As they did so the young man who had effected the rescue came back from the fountain, carrying an iron dipper containing water.

To his surprise, he found the young girl composed already.

It was as though the words she had just overheard—in apprising her of her having been the victim of merely a mistaken identity, instead of some actual intention that she had all along dreaded, and even half anticipated in her own case—had acted in the manner of a sedative, with the single exception of the man's name, Guernsey, which had, indeed, caused her a start of momentary surprise and alarm.

"See," said her rescuer, proffering the water with a laugh. "I had to wrench the dipper

from its chain, which explains my delay, and would perhaps stand me in for a penalty should the offense be known. But you are almost yourself again."

He was partly in the rays of a gas-lamp, while she was still in the shadow, and she noticed that his face was prepossessing, though not that of a handsome man.

It was in keeping with his voice and manner, which were gentle and winning; and his general aspect was that of an unassuming business gentleman.

"You are very good, sir; it was weak and selfish in me to put you to such additional trouble," she said, coming into the light and accepting the water with a simple gesture of thankfulness.

The young man stood for a moment in that mute, rapt attitude in which we not unfrequently contemplate an apparition of unexpected and extreme loveliness.

The girl might have been nineteen or twenty, though, at a first glance, she appeared far more youthful, her figure was so girlish, yet matured.

Her face was a thoroughly American one, with quite as much character as beauty in it. She had large brown eyes, that were not without a certain troubled, hunted look in their clear depths, but which the young man thought the sweetest, gentlest he had ever seen. She had an abundance of dark brown hair, tastefully arranged under her broad hat, a complexion of that clear, healthful pallor, susceptible to occasional seashell tints, which is so suggestive of being illuminated and permeated by some inner spiritual light; and her voice was velvety, with a pretty characteristic of slurring the *r* in speaking, which in another might have been deemed a defect, but seemed an additional charm in her.

In a word, the young man was perfectly sure that he had never encountered such a modestly beautiful and attractive young woman.

"Will you permit me to hazard a conjecture concerning you, miss?" said he, at length.

She handed him back the dipper with a grave air, but there was no negative in the sweet eyes as she did so.

"Well, then," he continued, "I opine that you are a stranger in New York, that you have just arrived from perhaps a long journey, and, furthermore, that you are not very certain as to where you are going, or what you shall do. Though for the life of me," he went on, more animatedly, "I cannot imagine the circumstances that could have thrown upon the wicked streets of our city at this time of night a young lady like you, unprotected, even unaccompanied, with your youth, your refinement, your—your—"

"Please don't, sir!" interposed the girl, with a slight smile of reproof for the complimentary vein into which he was lapsing. "Those circumstances must remain unexplained. Neither can I tell you where I am from, though you have pretty accurately divined my friendless and lonely condition here to-night. Will you tell me how I can best reach this address?"

She handed him the bit of writing that she had several times consulted already.

"Mrs. J. H. Brown," he read off aloud, while holding the paper up under the lamp—

"Mrs. J. H. Brown, — West Forty-fifth street." Why, that is far from here—away over by Eleventh avenue, and in a dangerous quarter, to boot. There are no horse cars going in that direction, either; and you shouldn't dream of going on foot unattended. See! though that thunder-shower has gone over with but a few drops, a fresh one is threatening that may bring a regular down-pour; and, though public hacks may be had, why, perhaps—

"You are right, sir," interrupted the girl, quickly. "I would not be able to pay for a carriage."

"I say, now," said the young man, smiling, and with a certain boyishness of manner that did not misbecome him, "be frank with me, miss, will you? And let me be of still further service to you."

The girl looked at him more scrutinizingly than she had yet done.

"Yes, sir—perhaps so," she replied, in a dreary friendlessness of tone that straightway redoubled his sympathy.

"Thank you, miss," returned the young man, heartily. "In the first place, then, what a romantic adventure was that of yours—those ruffians trying to carry you off, I mean. Have you any idea who they were, and what they could have intended?"

For reasons of her own, the girl decided to say nothing of what she had noted during his absence at the fountain.

"They might have mistaken me for some one else; that is all I can imagine," she responded.

"Odd, now, isn't it? But, do you know, I fancied that you might have apprehended just the sort of ruffianism that was attempted, and that you shrunk from publicity almost as much as from the attempt itself?"

The girl started.

"What makes you think so?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Because, frightened as you were, and strug-

gle as you did, you made not a single outcry. It was the first thing that struck me as I ran to your assistance. I never saw anything like it."

She bit her lip, and her youthful face assumed an impenetrable expression.

"Much suffering, even much alarm, may be undergone in silence," she murmured. "Both of those bad men were wholly unknown to me."

"As a matter of course, and we'll trust they'll be hanged in good season," observed the young fellow, cheerfully. "Now, what do you say, miss, to telling me just a little about yourself, so I'll know where you stand? Then I'll tell you all about myself that you care to know, to sort of square the account. How will that do?"

"Perhaps, sir, it is more than fair," the girl admitted, with a faint smile, "because there is so little that I care to tell—or, perhaps I should say, that is worth the knowing—regarding myself." Then, after a pause, she went on, slowly: "My name is Marion—Marion Moreton." The young man felt sure that the last name had just been invented to order, but the first one, Marion, seemed so beautiful that he cared nothing for the deception. "I am here from some distance to make my home in New York. Mrs. Brown's address was given me a long while ago by a sewing-woman who was in my em—I mean, whom I was acquainted with. I was intending to board with Mrs. Brown at first."

She colored and cast down her eyes. The fact of her having no traveling-bag, or anything of the sort, and of how odd it must look, seemed for the first time to strike her painfully.

"Ah, I see, Miss Moreton," said the young man, encouragingly. "And, after Mrs. Brown, what then?"

"That is about all there is to tell. After that I shall seek for work."

He looked at her face, his eyes ran over the refined lines of her girlish figure, he glanced incredulously at her ungloved hands, which were beautifully small, white and delicate, though wholly devoid of rings.

"Oh, but I can and will, sir!" she protested, quickly and earnestly. "I am older and more experienced than I look—in fact, I am past twenty. Then, I am a pretty fair accountant, and I once knew a girl—in fact, was quite intimate with her—who worked in a book-bindingery."

Whether this last instance of Miss Moreton's proficiency struck the young man as conclusive or only comical, he at once broke into a peal of laughter so hearty and enjoyable as to be good to hear.

"Come, now; Fate must have thrown us together for a purpose!" he declared. "What will you think when I tell you that I am a book-binder, Miss Moreton? It is, nevertheless, strictly true, and my father, long since dead, was a bookbinder before me. Well, exchange of confidences is the order of the evening, isn't it? My name is Harold Harcourt."

She started at the name, as having been mentioned in the altercation she had overheard a short time before.

"Five years ago, when I was nothing but a poor journeyman, with my mother and sister to support, besides myself, I invented and patented an improved paper-folder. It has been a success, and I am getting to be well off, with an extensive book-bindingery of my own. That's about the size of me in a worldly way, Miss Moreton."

"I am so glad it has been well with you, Mr. Harcourt," assured the young girl, with simple impulsiveness.

"Are you really, though?" he queried, in a pleased tone. "Come, now that is pleasant."

"Do you think so? But, oh, dear, I must be moving along. It is beginning to rain again."

"So it is; and therefore you can't do better than come right along with me. My mother will make you more welcome than you can imagine, Miss Moreton. No fear of her having gone to bed yet; she always sits up for me."

A glad, relieved look sprang into the girl's pure face. Then its impenetrable, half-distrustful look returned. But he held out his hand so frankly, so engagingly, that her hesitation vanished and they walked on together.

Instead of leaving the iron dipper at the fountain, whence he had wrenched it away, Harold paused at the edge of the avenue to give it to a policeman, with a few words of explanation, saying he feared it might be stolen if left detached from its chain.

The officer looked surprised and thanked him respectfully as he took charge of the dipper.

For this simple act of honesty Marion thought even more highly of her companion than before.

Harold lived in a broad, old-fashioned house, standing well back from the sidewalk, with a little garden around it, in Thirty-ninth street.

Here Marion was introduced to Mrs. Harcourt, Harold's mother, a sweet old lady, who at once received the young girl with a motherly kindness that drew tears to her eyes.

Then a bold-eyed, over-dressed and rather handsome young woman flounced into the room.

Marion with difficulty maintained her composure. It was the young woman she had seen and overheard in altercation with the man calling himself Albert Guernsey in the Park!

CHAPTER II.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITANT.

THIS young woman was introduced to Marion as Harold's sister Fanny, and the latter was, as a matter of course, likewise informed of the somewhat romantic circumstances under which the stranger had become a guest.

She was coldly polite, and eyed Marion with secret interest, as might have been expected.

As for Marion, wholly apart from her possession of Miss Harcourt's connubial secret, as it might be called, she felt instinctively antagonized.

It was now late, however, and there was a general retirement for the night. Mrs. Harcourt conducted Marion to a pleasant front hall-bedroom, which was next to the larger room occupied by herself, and, kissing her tenderly on the forehead, wished her a good-night, with pleasant dreams.

Bodily fatigued, the young girl was soon asleep, but her mental excitement had been such, together with the novelty of her surroundings, that her rest was not profound.

It was rudely disturbed by an alarming incident.

Marion indeed seemed fated for exciting adventure.

In this instance, she suddenly sat up in bed, broad awake, to perceive the room full of moonlight, with the exception of the bed itself, which was in the shadow, and a man crawling in at the one open window!

He had doubtless climbed up outside by means of one of the street-door columns, and was still so much occupied with his first precautions as not to perceive that she had been aroused.

Marion would certainly have cried out now, but that an instantaneous recognition of the intruder caused her to maintain a silence, though with a great effort, and to sink back upon her pillow, while still painfully conscious of his every movement.

It was Albert Guernsey!

She recognized him by his supple, seedily-clad figure, and even by so much of his sinister features as was visible, though a black half-mask partly concealed them.

He carried in his hands no weapon or burglarious implement.

Slipping into the room, he glanced indifferently toward the bed, as if sure that its inmate had not been disturbed, and then moved toward the door communicating with the hall, which was near the head-board.

Marion was possessed of unusual nerve. She felt certain that the man had no intention of harming or molesting her, should she continue to counterfeit unconsciousness. She felt equally convinced that, perhaps with no generally felonious purpose, his objective point was the bed-chamber of Harold's sister—which was the large one directly behind Mrs. Harcourt's—but with what design? They had been secretly married, as she had accidentally discovered. But she had likewise discerned the fellow to be a desperate character, an ex-convict, who might not hesitate at the commission of a fresh crime. Might not his object now be a renewal of his terrors in the solemn stillness of that lonely hour, and, in the event of their still proving ineffectual, revenging himself even to the extent of murder?

This last consideration, together with the thought of what she owed to the hospitality that had relieved her friendlessness, at once overcame every thought for her own safety.

As the fellow was stealing toward the door she suddenly sat bolt-upright, though shrinking back against the wall, and exclaimed, in a severe but tremulous voice:

"Why are you here? Begone this instant, or I'll bring the house about your ears!"

The man turned upon her with a fierce, wolfish look, and thrust one hand into his breast.

"Ha! awake?" he growled. "Silence, or you are lost! I mean you no harm, but if you attempt an alarm I will kill you!"

"I am not afraid of you one bit!" boldly continued the girl, gathering courage from his hesitation. "I give you one more warning to go out of this house at once, or—"

"Vengeance of Heaven!"

She had, unawares, brought her face into the full moonlight, and the man, with this startled exclamation on his lips, had suddenly shrunk against the opposite wall, and was glaring at her through his mask!

"Vengeance of Heaven!" he repeated, in a hollow voice; "is it the Widow Bernard alive again, and in her first youth?"

Instantly the girl's alarm, in its turn, was replaced by a great and devouring interest.

In spite of her embarrassing position, within arm's-length of this desperate wretch, a slight flush sprung into her face, a wild hope into her eyes, and her quivering lips were parted to question him.

But here there was a movement in the adjoining room, followed by a tapping on the intervening door, after which Mrs. Harcourt's pleasant voice called out:

"Are you awake, Miss Moreton, or only talking in your sleep?"

The man threw a swift, appealing look at Marion.

"Spare me!" said he, in a hoarse whisper. "Whoever you are, I may be able to tell you something you would like to know."

But it was now too late, regret the baffled opportunity as she might.

"I am awake, and there must be some one in the room!" she cried, in a clear, ringing voice.

"Yes, I am sure there is. Robbers! robbers! Help! help!"

The man uttered a fierce malediction in an undertone, and, tearing open the door, rushed into the passage, while Mrs. Harcourt was heard to scream and a moment later to throw up a window and call for the police.

For her own part, Marion, while slipping out of bed and seizing her garments almost simultaneously with the intruder's exit, had marked his disappearance round a slight angle in the direction of Miss Harcourt's door.

Then, while hurriedly dressing herself, she lent her voice to the old lady's in alarming the house.

Harold and the servant, both having their apartments up above, quickly made their appearance, partly dressed, the former armed with a stout blackthorn cudgel.

He lost no time in turning up the gas through the halls; a moment later two policemen were admitted, and then, after every room in the house above and below the second floor had been searched without success, they were all gathered together, with the single exception of Miss Harcourt, and Marion for the first time had an opportunity to tell her story in detail.

She did so, with no reservation, save to the man's mysterious words upon seeming to recognize a resemblance in her to some one else.

"So you're sure, then, miss, that the fellow neither ran up-stairs nor down?" said the roundsman who was heading the search. "Good enough! He must then be in one of the four rooms on this floor. Come, Jones."

Accompanied by the patrolman, he next successively searched the bath-room, Mrs. Harcourt's apartment and the one Marion had occupied, but without avail.

But one room remained unexplored. This was Miss Harcourt's, the door of which was found to be locked, with no indication of wakefulness on the part of its inmate, notwithstanding the tramping and loud talking that had been going on through the house.

The roundsman tried the door of the room.

"The rascal must be in here, if anywhere," said he. "It's regular occupant must be a sound sleeper, whoever it is."

"It is my sister's room, and she's not accustomed to locking herself in, either," said Harold, angrily.

He shook the door, calling upon his sister's name.

Miss Harcourt's voice, in apparently sleepy tones, was soon heard in response.

"What is the matter?" it cried. "Is the house on fire?"

Words of explanation followed, the door was presently opened, and the young lady appeared in an elaborate dressing-gown, looking astonished and scared.

But at the same time she flashed a furtive glance at Marion, which the latter could not help thinking the exact reverse of sleepy or surprised.

"A burglar in the house—perhaps in my room!" exclaimed Miss Harcourt, wildly. "Impossible! How could such a thing have chanced without disturbing me? Oh, mamma! what does it all mean?"

The roundsman made an impatient gesture.

"Are you in the habit of locking your door before retiring, miss?" he asked.

She was confused.

"No, not, always," she stammered, "though sometimes I do."

"Did you lock yourself in before retiring to-night?"

She could not remember, and then thought that she had not.

"Ah! I see how it may have been," she exclaimed. "The wicked man must have slipped through my room on the alarm being given, locking the door behind him, and jumping out of the window into the garden."

"A high jump!" remarked Harold. "He is more likely concealed within."

"How can you say so, Harold Harcourt? See; the window is open, and I'm sure of closing it before going to bed, on account of the mosquitoes."

Followed by the rest, the roundsman crossed the room, and peered down out of the open window.

"It's a deep jump down there," said he. "Neither is there any displacement in the shrubbery directly underneath. Well, we must search the room."

"There is no need of that, thank you!" said Miss Harcourt, shortly.

"Merely for form's sake, miss."

"Let the search proceed," commanded Harold, in his abrupt, decided way; and no more was said.

The officers looked under the bed, and through two closets, but without avail.

There remained a large wardrobe, whose doors were locked.

After they had been tried, Miss Harcourt coolly placed herself before them.

"There's no need of searching this," said she, determinedly. "This dressing-gown that I'm wearing I took out of it just before admitting you. And besides"—with a well-affected shamefacedness as the roundsman still made a motion toward the wardrobe—"it contains clothing of a certain kind that— Oh! what do men know about such things?"

The roundsman slightly elevated his shoulders, and drew back respectfully.

"Well, the fellow's made off, I suppose," said he, turning away dejectedly.

"Hold on, Cap!" called out his subordinate, picking up something from the floor. "Here's a trifle he may have dropped in making off."

The gas had been lighted in the room, and they all eagerly took a look at what had been found.

It was the soiled photograph of a wizened-faced little boy of three or four years.

"Do any of you happen to own this?" inquired the roundsman, addressing himself to every one in general and Miss Harcourt in particular.

Marion alone noticed that the latter's countenance underwent a change.

"I never saw the picture before," averred Miss Harcourt, coldly.

Neither had any of the others, it seemed, so the roundsman pocketed the photograph, saying that it might lead to something, and the search was at an end.

As they were passing out of the room Marion cared little for a second resentful look from Miss Harcourt's eyes, for she felt morally certain the young lady's husband was even at that moment concealed in the wardrobe!

Still, Miss Harcourt was not content to let well enough alone.

"Mamma!" she called out from the doorway, after again turning down the light, "are you quite sure that any one entered the house, at all? Might not Miss—Miss What's-her-name have been over-fanciful, mistaken, or—or something else?"

Marion colored, while Harold looked angry, and his mother annoyed.

"No mistake about it," said the roundsman, as he was passing down the stairs. "There's an invalid across the street—a lady who sits up all night with the asthma—and she saw the chap climb the door-post."

This was the end of the night's adventure.

CHAPTER III.

MARION'S MYSTERY UNBOSOMED.

SOON after breakfast on the following day, Marion accompanied Harold down-town to his place of business.

"How can you like that creature, mamma?" exclaimed Fanny at the first opportunity.

"Do you refer to Miss Moreton, my dear?"

"Of course, I do! Miss Moreton, indeed? Why couldn't she have invented some other name, of all names in the world? For I'd lay my life she did invent it."

"It isn't certain at all, Fanny. However, it is odd she should bear the same name as the major's."

"Odd! A shameful fatality, at least! The idea of her owning the same noble name as my—as Herbert St. George Moreton!"

The person alluded to was a well-preserved, fashionable gentleman—a reticent club-man of some means, considerable notoriety at whist-tables, and of not clearly-announced antecedents—who, smitten some time before by Fanny's fine figure, was rather indolently paying his addresses, in blissful ignorance, as was the rest of the world, of her being already married, and ashamed to seek a divorce because of the exposure necessarily connected with such a proceeding.

"I like Miss Moreton," said Mrs. Harcourt, quietly. "I might even come to love her."

"But why, mamma, why? Has she let you know anything more about her than Harold does, which is just nothing whatever? No. What can you see to like in her, then?"

Mrs. Harcourt couldn't or wouldn't tell. Perhaps it was vaguely because the unmistakable purity and loveliness of the young stranger promised to fill a certain void in her motherly craving for daughterly love and companionship which Fanny herself had never filled, but she did not say so.

All she would say was:

"Miss Moreton seems a nice young girl. Besides, her conduct last night was discreet and courageous."

"Oh, don't allude to that adventure again!" protested Fanny, with a shudder. "The mere thought of it makes my blood run cold. Besides, we had it all over again at breakfast."

"Well, then, I simply like Miss Moreton, without knowing or caring why I do."

"What a logician you are, mamma!"

"In what way, Fanny?"

"Why, don't you see that Harold is already head over ears in love with this girl?"

No; Mrs. Harcourt hadn't seen anything of the sort. In fact, she didn't believe a word of it.

Fanny retorted that it was not her fault if her mother was blind to the designs of the art-

ful adventuress; a girl with a mystery; a girl from she dared not herself say where, and with nothing but the clothes to her back; a girl that—Well, she would not attempt to characterize her as she might.

Mrs. Harcourt was indignant.

"Fanny, I am ashamed of you!" she exclaimed. "I will not listen further to your causeless spitefulness against a friendless girl, who innocently happens to be prettier and younger than yourself!"

Prettier and younger! Fanny was mostly a little afraid of her mother, but now she started up with an angry color in either cheek.

Here, however, there was a ring at the door-bell, followed by an announcement.

"Miss Harcourt," said the servant, looking in, "Major Moreton is in the parlor."

"Mind, mamma," whispered Fanny, kissing her mother contritely. "Not a word of our young stranger. Herbert must not be bored on any account."

Harold came home alone that evening, but in excellent spirits.

Marion he reported as duly installed in the capacity of time-keeper at six dollars a week, to her own satisfaction and that of Mrs. Forsyth, the forewoman; and Mr. Quick, the superintendent, thought it likely that she might ultimately assist at the books, and in making estimates, when she would command a book-keeper's wages.

"Where is she now?" asked Mrs. Harcourt, greatly pleased at what she heard.

"Mrs. Forsyth took her to her boarding-place up on Sixth avenue, near Central Park," answered Harold. "In fact, I accompanied them there, after first ascertaining that the Mrs. Brown whom Miss Moreton had been looking for, no longer lived at the given address."

"Oh!" was Fanny's sarcastic exclamation; but she felt so relieved at the thought of being rid of Marion as a house-mate that she actually abstained from any further manifestation of ill-nature, just then.

As for Marion, she was happier in her new-found and scarcely hoped-for independence than she had been for many a long day, if not for many a weary year.

Days and weeks passed, bringing with them additional contentment. While occasionally visiting Mrs. Harcourt, at the pressing invitation of that esteemed good lady, the greater part of her leisure was given to the companionship and growing friendship of Mrs. Forsyth.

Marion, indeed, would have found difficulty in explaining her increasing fondness and sympathy for this woman, the sentiments were so indefinable, and yet she felt a strange delight in the consciousness that they were fully reciprocated.

Mrs. Forsyth was a middle-aged, mostly taciturn and rather severe woman, who had perhaps once been beautiful, but the exact characteristic of whose features could never be determined from the fact of her always wearing large, hideous blue spectacles by reason of an alleged infirmity of vision.

Unbending and sternly practical with every one else, Mrs. Forsyth was the incarnation of kindness and sympathy toward Marion, from the very outset; while Marion, on her part, was more than once on the verge of unbosoming her secret in return for so much goodness.

At last she even did so.

They were lunching together in their accustomed nook in the folding-room, when Mrs. Forsyth chanced to allude to Marion's reticence as to her past in a manner that seemed to agitate the young girl strangely.

"I think I had better tell you my history," said she, after a troubled pause.

"Do so, my dear," urged her companion, surprised and gratified.

"My real name is Marion Bernard. I can remember but little of my parents, and all that I can surmise about them was instilled into my mind by Mr. William Bernard, my father's half-brother and also my guardian; the man of all men that I most fear and distrust—the man from whom I am at present a fugitive, under an assumed name. By him I was told that my father died of shame and a broken heart through my mother's disgraceful elopement with the cashier of the bank of which my father was the president. I was left an only child, and an heiress, in my guardian's care. His wife was a good and sweet woman, with no children of her own. She was a second mother to me until her death, four years ago, just as I was finishing my schooling. Since her death, up to the hour of my escape, my life has been a constant seclusion, persecution and torture."

She paused, with a heaving breast, and then went on hurriedly:

"My guardian is nearly treble my age, and yet he has never ceased to urge his odious professions of love upon me—to importune me to marry him, in order, as I very well know, that he may obtain my fortune, which otherwise comes wholly under my own control in less than a year, when I shall become of age. His tyranny at last became unbearable. I was virtually a prisoner in his house. I seized the opportunity to escape here to New York. You

know the rest. Excuse me, I will speak more fully at another time. I am now too agitated. Oh, how I loathe and fear that man! If he should succeed in tracking me down, I would die of terror—I am almost sure I would!"

Mrs. Forsyth had listened with an agitation almost equaling the speaker's, but she was now composed.

"Poor child!" she said, soothingly. "But why should this bad man pursue you so relentlessly?"

"Through fear."

"Through fear, and of whom?"

"Through fear of what I know!" continued Marion, in an excited whisper. "I am in possession of his secret, and he knows it."

"His secret?"

"Yes; I believe that he not only keeps my poor mother locked up somewhere in a mad-house, but that he likewise murdered the man she was falsely accused of running away with! But, my dear Mrs. Forsyth, you seem as unnerved as I."

"Not I! You mistake, and yet your story is strangely interesting. Pray, go on, my dear."

"Not now, please. But more at another time. Hark! there is the whistle, and the machinery is starting up."

That evening, after work was over, Marion, in accordance with a previous promise, accompanied the forewoman on a hasty shopping excursion, before going home.

It was lovely weather, the sun had barely set, and Broadway was thronged with fashionable promenaders.

Marion had by this time, with Mrs. Forsyth's help, replenished her wardrobe, so that she was enabled to make a good, and even striking appearance in public.

A charming light gray suit, of inexpensive but becoming material, fitted her pretty figure so perfectly as to seem of more consequence than it really was: she had, moreover, a naturally graceful and elegant carriage; her face was bright and animated in sympathy with the moving scene of which she formed a part; and her elderly companion was speedily aware of the admiration that was being unconsciously attracted to the beautiful girl.

"If you fear detection, Marion," said she, in a low voice, "you must not often venture upon Broadway in the daytime."

"But why?" demanded Marion, with genuine simplicity. "Surely in such a great throng no one could think of singling me out."

"You little innocent! Are you so blind to your own beauty as all that?"

Marion blushed, but made no reply.

It was near the Fourteenth street corner of Broadway that Mrs. Forsyth suddenly felt her companion's hand close convulsively on her arm.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Oh!"

She turned to perceive Marion as white as death.

"What is it?" repeated Mrs. Forsyth, this time in real alarm. "Bless me! my dear, are you ill?"

Marion was staring at a passing open barouche, with a single occupant lolling back among the luxurious cushions.

"Look!" she gasped, shrinking back, yet pointing with her hand. "Do you not see?"

"Who? What?"

"There, there! the gentleman in the open carriage."

"Yes, now I do. Bless me! it is the man you dread!"

"Yes, yes; it is he—my guardian—my bitter foe!" murmured the young girl, in an agony of trepidation. "Oh, hide me away somewhere, anywhere! Mingle me with the crowd—take me into a store—anywhere! If he sees me, I am lost!"

CHAPTER IV.

TRACKED, BUT SAVED.

MRS. FORSYTH lost no time in grasping Marion's arm, and hurrying her toward the entrance of a large fancy-goods store on their left.

But at that instant the man in the barouche caught a glimpse of the young girl.

He was seen to touch his driver's shoulder with his cane, as if giving a peremptory order.

"Not in here, but around the corner!" gasped Marion, faintly. "Quick! he has recognized me!"

As they were hurrying around the Fourteenth street corner, what should they do but run almost into the arms of Harold Harcourt himself, who was enjoying the promenade before going to his home.

He looked astonished and puzzled, but Mrs. Forsyth seemed equal to almost any emergency.

"Mr. Harcourt, I beg you to intercept the man who is following us—a large, portly man with iron-gray hair," she whispered, while scarcely pausing. "He is Miss Moreton's mortal enemy."

Still mystified, he answered with an intelligent look.

Then, following two ladies who had just pass-

ed into an entrance and were about to ascend to a photographer's gallery, Mrs. Forsyth and Marion turned off between some show cases toward a small open side-door to the right into a millinery store, and straightway disappeared therein.

Almost at the same instant "the large, portly man with iron-gray hair," who had just alighted from the barouche, came shouldering his way around the corner.

Either by accident or design, he was suddenly brought in violent contact with Harold Harcourt.

The latter's frame was tough as hickory and springy as steel, and Mr. Bernard's, which was quite the reverse, though lumbering and unwieldy, recoiled from the shock in momentary collapse.

"What do you mean?" blustered the big man, as he slowly recovered. "What part of the city are you from that you treat a gentleman that way?"

"What may you mean?" was the cool rejoinder. "And what part of the country are you from that you seem to imagine other people pasture-grass, and yourself a mad bull?"

"Pshaw! perhaps I ought to apologize," returned the other, laughing it off, and in too great a hurry to quarrel. "Sir, do be so good as to tell me—" and he scanned the adjacent throngs and shop doors with devouring interest—"if you chanced just now to see two ladies—one elderly and with blue spectacles, the other young and very beautiful—disappears somewhere hereabouts?"

Harold bowed and smiled.

"Two ladies, one elderly, the other young, just this moment ascended yonder staircase," said he, directing the other's attention to the entrance at the side of which the fugitives had disappeared, and yet speaking the literal truth.

"Good! Thanks, sir, thanks!" And Mr. Bernard lost no time in ambling skyward in the direction of the photographer's at the top of his speed.

Harold at once signaled a passing coach, and then, stepping to the door of the milliner's, made a significant sign to the fugitives, who were nervously looking over some ribbons at one of the counters.

A moment later, when Mr. Bernard, enraged and perspiring, made his reappearance on the sidewalk, it was only to see his obliging informant lifting his hat from an open public hack that was crossing Union Square at a rapid pace, and in which the truant Marion was crouching, safely beyond his reach, at the forewoman's side.

"Let him fret and fume his fill," remarked Harold, gayly. "New York is so big that no one need be found in it against one's will; that is—" and he stole a look askance at Marion, "unless some sort of indiscretion might be following one up, you know."

The young girl's humid eyes were eloquent of gratitude in response, but no more.

"Why, you are not taking us home, Mr. Harcourt?" she presently exclaimed. "You are taking us to your mother's."

"She'll be happy to have you dine with us," explained Harold, complacently.

She offered a weak protest, but he affected not to hear her.

As they ascended the steps Fanny chanced to be saying good-by to her admirer, Major Moreton.

He was an indolent, aristocratic-looking man, of anywhere between fifty-five and sixty, and honored Marion with an approving stare through his gold-rimmed eye-glass.

Marion, however, merely hurried into the house after her companions, without remarking that Mrs. Forsyth had given a start upon perceiving the major, as though making a little-expected recognition.

The worthy forewoman was already acquainted with Harold's mother, and Harold offered an off-hand explanation for bringing the ladies home with him, without making the slightest allusion to the adventure, thus winning another eloquent glance from Marion as his reward.

There was always something of a restorative in the Harcourts' comfortable, unpretentious style of living, and good Mrs. Harcourt seemed even more than usually kind and agreeable on this evening.

Fanny's spitefulness toward the young girl, however, had not undergone any diminution.

When they were all gathered a brief space in the drawing-room after dinner, she flung herself down to the piano, and, with some music open before her, began to torture the instrument with much vigor and persistence.

This was in wretched taste of itself, apart from her performance, indicating neither application nor natural ability, but as she played she kept turning her head and directing her shafts at poor Marion.

"Isn't it odd, Miss Moreton," she called out between the thumps, "that you should have the same name as the gentleman you met on the steps when entering?"

"But the fine gentleman's name could hardly have been Marion," was the quiet reply.

"Indeed! No; but it was and is Major Herbert St. George Moreton. What do you think

of it, I say, the oddness of such a name belonging to a working girl like you?"

"I don't think of it at all, Miss Harcourt," replied Marion, still composedly.

Then she turned in surprise to Mrs. Forsyth, who had uttered a slight exclamation on hearing the name of Fanny's visitor.

Harold was not always patient with his sister. "Fanny," said he, shortly, "if you must talk nonsense, give over pounding that inoffensive keyboard while doing so! You never could play intricate music, and your trying is merely an annoyance."

"Your politeness is overpowering," snapped Fanny, starting up, with a parting dig at the keys. "Perhaps there's some one else here who can do better."

"I fancy Miss Moreton might try to, at least," was Harold's reply, taking Marion's hand, and laughingly drawing her to her feet. "She once casually told me she could play. Come; do oblige us, Miss Moreton."

Altogether for Fanny's sake, Marion resisted earnestly, but Mrs. Harcourt warmly seconded her son's entreaties.

It ended in Marion seating herself unwillingly at the piano.

Now she did know how to play, and it chanced that the piece spread out on the music rack had been one of her favorites. It was one of Chopin's most intricate and exquisite compositions. Once enthused, she forgot herself entirely, and rendered it with fascinating expression.

If Fanny had disliked Marion before, she positively hated her after this.

Harold insisted on seeing the visitors home. It was Marion who, directly after quitting the house, noticed a man lurking suspiciously behind a tree.

Still willing to shield Fanny, she said nothing to her companions, though recognizing the prowler as Albert Guernsey.

But could she have known how critically his being there concerned herself, though indirectly, she might have been less reticent.

When the boarding-house was reached, Mrs. Forsyth went at once to her room, leaving Marion and Harold to themselves in the parlor. Harold held out his hand.

The young girl took and pressed it in an impulse of gratitude.

"Miss Moreton—Marion!" said Harold, in a low voice; "there seems to be a mystery about you. Though you may not see fit to take me into your confidence—"

"Oh, I cannot—I dare not! at least, not yet, sir—not now!"

She turned away her head, quickly withdrawing her hand, almost with a shudder.

"I feel that you cannot—in fact, I do not ask it," said he. "But I want you to call on me, to let me champion your cause in any trouble or difficulty. Will you do so?"

She slightly inclined her head.

"For I love you! I feel my love for you to be so great that I would die for you, if necessary," he continued, brokenly.

For a single instant her sweet face was radiant as she raised it to him—radiant and joyous, like a sun-kissed eglantine, after long days of beating and tempestuous rains—but it was troubled and dark again as she turned it away.

But the young man had caught back her hand, covering it with kisses, though an instant later, upon an interruption threatening, he hastily quitted the room and the house.

It was Mrs. Forsyth who made her appearance as he departed.

Marion hurriedly accompanied her up-stairs, their young communicating.

The young girl's original agitation had returned. She declared to Mrs. Forsyth that she must go away, that she was sure her guardian would discover her whereabouts.

The elder woman gravely shook her head.

"Marion, it is not so," said she. "Your fear of this man—and I cannot comprehend it, knowing your ordinarily strong nerve—misleads you into exaggerated imaginings. Listen to me. In case of the emergency which you dread, I will provide you with a retreat."

Marion looked up hopefully.

"It is here in this city," continued Mrs. Forsyth, "with a woman who once befriended me. But nothing is less likely to arise than such an emergency. In the mean time I want you to promise to just continue in your duties as though nothing had intervened."

She said much more, in an equally consoling and encouraging vein, and the young girl at length promised to act as was advised.

"Now, Marion," continued Mrs. Forsyth, presently, when they were preparing to retire, "inform me more fully upon two points in your history, and I shall not inquire into it again."

"Yes."

"Why do you suspect that there was a murder, and that your mother remains confined in a mad-house?"

"My guardian's tyranny made me something of a spy upon him, in my own defense," explained Marion, after a troubled pause. "A rough old man named Guernsey occasionally visited him. From several of their interviews, which I overheard, I learned that this old man, in my

guardian's interest, was keeping a woman, presumably my poor mother, in close, but perhaps not over-cruel, confinement—had been keeping her thus confined for many years. Guernsey was always after money, and my guardian is close and grasping. At one of these interviews they had a dispute, combined with vague threats on Guernsey's part. From these I gathered that my mother had been foully slandered, in order to effect the death of my father, who suffered from heart disease, and had been in feeble health generally. It was horrible! But, my dear Mrs. Forsyth, you are agitated."

"Your story is a harrowing one, Marion," answered the forewoman, composing herself. "Do go on."

"The cashier was named Redfield—Joel Redfield. It was him that my mother was rumored to have eloped with. She had, in reality, accompanied him upon some pressing charitable and necessarily secret errand—whose exact nature, however, I was never able to discover—to the village of Lake Falls, on Lake George. It was all through the plotting contrivance of my guardian, who was then a subordinate in my father's bank. Mr. Redfield chanced to have with him a large sum of the bank's money, which he was afterward thought to have stolen, in addition to eloping with mamma. He was, in reality, I judge from what I overheard, murdered for this money—murdered by this Guernsey and a vicious young son of his named Albert, but whether with the direct assistance or only secret connivance of my guardian I do not know. The murder took place in the woods near Lake Falls, and before my mother's eyes. The horror of the scene, temporarily at least, overturned her reason. She was taken charge of by Guernsey, and was after that as though dead and buried. My guardian's dreadful purposes were complete. My mother was gone; the shock of her supposed disgrace killed my father; I, little more than an infant, together with my inheritance, was left at the plotter's mercy. It is not, I judge, a regular mad-house in which my mother is still kept a prisoner, though long ere this, I firmly believe, in full possession of her reason. It must be at or near Guernsey's home, somewhere among the wild hills about Lake Falls. My own home and my guardian's, the place where I was born, is at Richburg."

She mentioned the real name of one of the larger Hudson River towns, which for obvious purposes, is disguised as above.

"My poor child!" said Mrs. Forsyth, "have you never thought of making these revelations public?"

"Yes," declared Marion, "but a number of considerations have deterred me. First, perhaps, there is the disgrace. Then, how could I substantiate what I have merely overheard? Then, again, my guardian is a powerful politician in his district. And, still more, ever since his discovery of my having obtained an inkling of his crimes, his haunting hate, watchfulness and even fear of me, have acted on me like a hideous spell. I believe I fear no one else in the world, but I dread and loathe him horribly! Oh, it is like the fascinating fear exerted by a deadly serpent!"

The tears were streaming from behind Mrs. Forsyth's blue spectacles, for without them she was never seen.

"My child, my child!" she murmured, taking Marion in her arms; "you shall be to me as my own. Together we will combat the purposes of this evil man!"

CHAPTER V.

A COWARDLY PLOT.

THE man whom Marion had noticed lurking in the neighborhood of the Harcourt house continued prowling in the vicinity even after Harold had returned, and until after the family had all apparently retired.

Then, not unmindful of the asthmatic neighbor, of whose observant habits he had been duly advised, he scaled the garden wall on the side overlooked by Fanny's bedroom window.

There was a light in it, and he speedily effected a communicating signal.

Fanny presently joined him in the narrow garden space, looking angry and indignant.

There was starlight.

"Why are you here?" she exclaimed, in a low voice. "Do you not get the money regularly?"

"Yes; such as it is," replied the fellow, with a short laugh. "Oh! but it's little enough, considering the swell gent who is dancing attendance on you! The deuce! you may marry the chap without a divorce from me, for all I care. It would only afford me a new wrinkle, especially as he's reported rich. However, I'm not come for more hush-money just now."

She seemed unaffectedly surprised at this assertion.

"Why, then, are you here?" she demanded. "Is it to rave afresh about that picture you dropped when I concealed you in the wardrobe? How did you come by it, anyway?"

"I stole it; but that's neither here nor there. I know you have lied to me all along—that it was the photo of our child, somewhere alive and well to this day."

"That snip of a changeling! You are a fool, Albert Guernsey! I've told you repeatedly of the child's death."

"And as repeatedly lied to me."

"Would you like to see his grave?"

"Ha, ha, ha! And you couldn't invent even that to order, of course? I tell you, I know the child is alive, and I will find out where you have secreted him. Then I can wring your heart, no less than your purse—if you've got such a piece of anatomy, which I question. But I'm not here to-night about the child, either."

She seemed again surprised.

"Your errand, then?" said she.

"You know the beautiful girl, through whose room I had to steal in the effort to reach your chamber?"

"Beautiful! Where were your eyes?"

"In my head—or perhaps half out of it when I suddenly seemed to recognize in her— But no matter. None of your envious airs, you jade! She is beautiful—lovely and pure as an angel. You know her, I say?"

"Yes."

"Is she still living here?"

"Not she!"

"Give me her address, with some idea of her daily habits."

"What for?"

"To work her harm, perhaps, or at least unhappiness," growled the vagabond, with a sullen, half-miserable change of tone.

The woman had been listening with growing astonishment, and now her eyes sparkled in the dim light.

"Prove that you mean what you say," she declared, "and I will do anything to place her in your power."

"What a fury you are, Fanny!" said he, eying her. "But then you were never anything else. Listen. You know something of my antecedents before I married you. It behooves you to know something of this girl's, also."

He briefly outlined to her as much of Marion's history as has already been vouchsafed to the reader, and then proceeded:

"Old Bernard is now at his hotel. My father is with him. They ferreted me out but a short time ago for their own purposes. I was to help them find out this girl's whereabouts. Mr. Bernard spotted her on the street, this afternoon, but she somehow escaped him. He is now waiting for my report. Now about the girl."

"But, what are they going to do with her?" Fanny demanded.

"Mr. Bernard will force her to marry him, if he can, I fancy. All her property, which father says is enormous, is in his hands, as her guardian, and, unless he marries her, he must account to her for its value when she comes of age, which will be inside of a year."

"Excellent! that is, if he is the brute you make him out to be. But, suppose he cannot force her to marry him?"

"Never you mind the alternatives; persuasives will doubtless be brought to bear," was the grim reply; for Guernsey had of course said nothing about the villainy practiced in the case of Marion's mother and the bank cashier. "Suffice it for you to know that old Bernard has reasons to both fear and love his ward. When he gets his hooks fairly on her again, she will not be likely to wriggle away."

Fanny now gave the rascal all the information about Marion's humble city life that she had been able to pick up, and this was a good deal.

"I suppose your own address is in the same disreputable quarter, Albert," she queried, in conclusion. "Yes? Well, then I shall send you any fresh information I may chance upon. In return, you must keep me informed as to the progress that is being made."

He assented to this, and the interview was at an end.

It was then late at night. Nevertheless, when Albert Guernsey, half an hour later, brought his report to the second-class hotel at which it was anxiously awaited, he found Mr. Bernard eager to receive him in a remote upper room.

In company with Mr. Bernard was Albert's father, a powerfully-framed, rustic-appearing old man, with beetling brows, secretive lips, and a generally forbidding cast of features.

Mr. William Bernard himself was a tall, portly, well-dressed man of fifty-odd, whose upright carriage and stiff-standing iron-gray hair gave him, at first glance, a somewhat manful, military aspect.

A half-filled decanter and some glasses were on the small table at which the pair were sitting.

The new-comer lost no time in helping himself liberally to the liquor, *sans cérémonie*, and it was quite obvious that he was held, generally, in as much disfavor and suspicion by his own father as by Mr. Bernard.

He nodded, however, saying: "I've got everything I was sent for, dead sure," as he took a seat; and proceeded, without further preliminary, to impart the information he had collected concerning Marion.

When it was finished, Mr. Bernard paid the vagabond five dollars, which had been promised,

though producing the money slowly and reluctantly.

Then, as Albert chuckingly helped himself to more liquor, and resumed his seat, Marion's guardian said, sharply:

"When I want you again, you'll be sent for. You can go now."

"I know I can, but I sha'n't, all the same," was the cool rejoinder.

Mr. Bernard stared, but with precious little effect.

"Oh, none of your high-and-mighties in this business, if you please!" continued the reprobate with increased *sang froid*. "You can't do without me in it, and I might as well take in the whole plot—shred, twist and tangle—first as last. Besides, I've got to report progress to the party who furnished me with the information you're watering your mouths over."

"The deuce you have!" exclaimed Mr. Bernard.

"Who gave you the information, you rascal?" demanded old Guernsey.

"Find out," was the dutiful response. "But it chanced to be a woman, though."

Father and son had been separated for many years, and the former knew literally nothing of the latter's antecedents in the interim, beyond the pithy fact of his having served a term in the State Prison for theft, or something of the sort.

"Well, the matter stands about this way," spoke Bernard, after a reflective pause. "Have the girl in my power I must, and with as little delay as possible. Even if I do not succeed in marrying her, it won't do to have her at liberty, with what she suspects or knows."

"Of course not," added Guernsey the elder. "Better stick to marrying her, though, by hook or crook, fair means or foul. There's her fortune!"

"Yes; and so dexterously tied up and hampered, looking to her future benefit, that I haven't been able to use hardly any of it, as yet. Nor will I be able to do better unless I make her mine. And here she will be of age in less than ten months. Lord! how the time passes."

"Run her up to my place, to keep her mamma company, as a persuader," advised Guernsey. "She'll weaken. Only get hold of her."

"Why, pop," exclaimed Albert, "you once told me Mrs. Bernard had died on your hands!"

Mr. Bernard looked up quickly and suspiciously.

"Of course I told you so, you fool!" Guernsey snorted, and then, with a contemptuous laugh: "but it was only to stop your visiting and pitying her, as you used to do, with your boyish nonsense."

Albert grinned, but looked thoughtful.

"Well, I must get Marion back, and here is my plan," resumed Bernard, impatiently returning to the main villainy in hand. "It won't do to apply to the authorities, for I must keep the business in the background for obvious reasons, as you know. Then it won't do to spirit her off from her boarding-place, or while passing to and from her employment. A crowd might be collected, and these New York crowds are apt to be—ur—somewhat unreasonable at times. No, no; her habit of walking with her elderly friend in Central Park of evenings, keeping among the lonelier paths, well up on the west side, offers us the best chance, without a doubt."

"Good!" ejaculated Guernsey. "Day after to-morrow is Sunday. That will be a good time."

"It will not be a good time," demurred Bernard. "The Park is always overcrowded on Sundays, in good weather. Besides, Marion is an unaffectedly pious girl, and would scarcely go far into the Park on that day, if only to take the air. No; but to-morrow, which is Saturday, when the work-people knock off earlier than usual, might answer."

"With all my heart," assented old Guernsey.

"You say," said Mr. Bernard, turning gruffly to Albert, "that Miss Bernard walks in Central Park on Saturday evenings?"

"I don't believe I've said so yet, old man," was the complacent rejoinder, "but she does, notwithstanding, when it doesn't rain cats and dogs. She has an early grub on Saturdays, and then strolls till dusk and later, along with the old woman in the blue goggles, keeping in the paths well up on the west side, as you sagely observed."

"To-morrow evening be it, then," announced Mr. Bernard, decisively. "Aha! I feel already as though my little beauty were once more in my power. I will have the railroad tickets in readiness for as near a point to Lake Falls as we can proceed by rail. Then for a coach, in which to snatch up the girl from the midst of her meditative promenade."

"I hope it'll work well," assured old Guernsey, knitting his brows.

"It's bound to, man, if properly executed. If she is over-demonstrative, we can pass her off as insane, and destined for Bloomingdale Asylum. Once in the coach with us, a little judicious chloroforming will facilitate the rest. By the way, who knows about securing the right sort of coach and driver?"

"I do."

It was Albert who spoke.

If they had known of his bungling in the former attempt at kidnapping, with which our story opened, they might have mistrusted his ability in this line of rascality, but as they were none the wiser, he was of course taken at his word.

Then the details of the conspiracy proceeded apace.

Albert Guernsey, on his part, was so well pleased with them that, on his way to the haunt, which he called his home, he passed once more by the Harcourt house, clambered the garden wall, and, wrapping around a pebble a brief scrawl setting forth these particulars, tossed it up through Fanny's open window, for her special edification.

CHAPTER VI.

BESET.

BUT the best-laid plans of villains, as of mice and men, "gang aft agley."

It chanced that the pebble-weighted missive, after passing through Fanny's window, fell noiselessly upon the carpeted floor, and then rolled under the bed in which Fanny was lying fast asleep.

The result was that it did not get into her hands at all, but, by the oddest of accidents, into those of her brother, instead.

It was after dinner, on the evening of the following day, that Harold began to search the dust-receptacles of the house, in the hope of finding a missing memorandum, which he fancied might have fallen from his pocket and have been swept up by the housemaid.

There were but two such receptacles, one being a coal-scuttle in the kitchen, the other a similar utensil usually kept in the bath-room, which adjoined Fanny's apartment.

It was lucky for Harold that neither of these receptacles had been emptied when he took up his seemingly unimportant search.

In neither, it is true, did he find what he was after, but among the sweepings in the bath-room he suddenly came upon the scrawl attached to the pebble.

It was as follows:

"SAT. MORN., 2 A. M.

"FANNY:—Call up the envious devil in your heart, and pat him on the head. The plot to carry off the girl you hate is arranged."

"This coming evening at dusk, wind and weather permitting, while she is strolling in Central Park with the old girl in blue spectacles!"

"It will be a clean snap up, close carriage at first, steam-cars afterward; and then it's either a marriage with the old hunk her guardian, or the wild hills of Lake George, and solitary retirement with her unfortunate mamma, as a gentle persuasive."

"At all events, you will be shut of her forever."

"Don't you think you owe me something extra for this? I do. And don't you forget it."

Upon spelling through this decidedly original production, Harold was at first mystified, then ashamed for his sister's sake, then thunder-struck, and then nerved with indignant energy, and all in a fleeting instant.

He knew his sister's spitefulness, and felt, with inward shame, that she would be capable of almost any meanness in compassing the unhappiness of Marion.

Likewise, without dreaming of her outside relations, he divined how the missive, come whence it might, had fallen, providentially, he thought, into his hands by mistake. He divined this just as intuitively as he divined the extremity of Marion's peril at that moment.

He glanced at his watch. Only twenty minutes would intervene before that phase of the twilight commonly understood by the expression, "the dusk of the evening."

Scant space enough, with the safety and happiness of the girl he loved at stake, but the thought of this only served to steel and fire him to decisive action.

Thrusting the missive in his pocket, he seized his hat and a stout walking-stick, and rushed to the nearest livery stable.

A team had just been hitched to an open carriage, whose driver—a sturdy Irishman, with whom Harold was personally and favorably acquainted—was already on the box, with the intention of starting on his evening round in search of fares.

In an instant, Harold had engaged the turnout, and a moment later, he was being whirled up Seventh avenue at a rate wholly regardless of ordinances against fast driving, and at the same time leaning unsteadily over the driver's seat, explaining to the fellow as well as he could what might be expected of him.

The hackman, who rejoiced in the name of Kelly, was a free-hearted, somewhat turbulent chap, with a genuine Celtic love for an old-fashioned row of the Donnybrook stamp.

"Kape your seat an' be aisy, Mr. Harcourt," said he at last, while laying on the whip. "Sure, an' den't I know that you're well able and willin' to make it right wid the big-wigs an' the brass buttons, whatever may transpire?"

Harold nodded, and sunk back slightly more at his ease.

He had once accompanied Marion and Mrs. Forsyth in one of their Central Park strolls, and therefore had a pretty good notion as to

what quarter of the great pleasure-ground in which it would be best to look for them now.

But it was, nevertheless, more than half-dark when he was whirled in at the Eighth avenue corner entrance. From this point, while directing Kelly to keep wholly to the roadways on the left or west side of the Park, he strained his eyes on either side in a vain effort to recognize the figures of which he was in such frantic search.

The twilight was gathering down rapidly, and of the few pedestrians visible in the adjacent walks—the greater portion of which were, of course, obscured from his observation by trees and dense masses of shrubbery—he could for some time make out the outlines of none that could afford him any hope.

At last, however, as they were nearing the mouth of the transverse road at Eighty-sixth street, he discerned two figures on a neighboring path that made him think they might belong to Marion and her friend.

A second glance made him feel sure of it; for, in addition to his half-recognition of their forms, he at the same instant saw a rapidly-driven close-coach wheeling into the Park from Eighth avenue, that might well be the one containing the would-be abductors.

"There they are!" he cried, leaning forward, and directing Kelly's attention to the female figures. "Quick! or we are too late!"

Just then the carriage came to a pause at the side of the astonished Marion and her companion, for those, indeed, it proved to be.

Harold was out of the vehicle almost before it came to a stand; so was his hackman, for that matter, though he took his station at the horses' heads as a precaution, at the same time clubbing his loaded whip in readiness for a more critical emergency.

"Quick, ladies, or you are lost!" cried the excited Harold, fairly seizing hold of Marion. "I cannot explain now, but, Miss Moreton, your enemies are on your track! Into this coach, both of you! Even at this moment the villains might be here."

"Might be? Even as he spoke, and while he was in the act of lifting the terrified Marion into the coach, the villains were there."

Their equipage came rattling up to the side of the path. Marion's guardian, old Guernsey, and Albert, lost not an instant in tumbling out of it, and they were at once reinforced by two men on the box, whom Harold, in the flash of the moment, thought he identified as the same ruffians from whom he had rescued Marion in Reservoir Square.

"Hallo! we're betrayed—forestalled," cried Bernard, flourishing his cane. "Never mind. There are only two of 'em, and yonder's the girl! Seize her!"

He himself undertook to seize Marion as he spoke.

"Courage! Lose no time in getting into the coach here, and then wait the result," whispered Harold, as he stepped between the young girl and the threatened attack.

Harold chanced to be as dextrous as an Englishman at single-stick practice. He grasped his cane firmly, then there was a lightning pass or two between him and Bernard, after which the latter's gold-headed walking-stick went flying out of his hand, and he went reeling back under the force of a ringing blow on the side of the head.

His followers had wasted no time in coming to his support, and Albert Guernsey already had hold of Marion, though she was half way in the open coach, and old Guernsey was defending himself as best he could from a shower of vigorous blows from Mrs. Forsyth's parasol. In the mean time, one of the unnamed ruffians was being engaged by Kelly, with all he could do to maintain his own, and his companion had to look to his horses, which were restless.

Harold, having staggered Bernard, once more relieved Marion by knocking Albert down, and then hurried her into the coach, cautioning her to cling therein with all her strength, whatever might chance.

Indeed, it appeared for the moment as if the twain were destined to prove victorious over the five; for by this time Kelly, the hackman, had disposed of his immediate antagonist, and was making an onset on the latter's chum, who was thus compelled to leave his fretful team unattended.

But, then, Harold had scarcely succeeded in putting Marion into the coach when he received a staggering blow from behind, the assailant being old Guernsey, who had temporarily relieved himself of the forewoman's vigorous attack. He was still dazed from this blow when he was prostrated by a yet heavier one from Bernard, who had recovered his cane and quickly rallied, while fuming with rage and malice.

For an instant the young man lay there at the mercy of these elderly ruffians. But, Mrs. Forsyth was by no means *hors du combat*, though with her sun-umbrella in rags and splinters. She sprang like a tigress upon Bernard, twining his throat with her bony fingers, thus relieving Harold, and enabling him to regain his feet.

"Hag!" blustered Bernard, disengaging his throat, and then thrusting his feminine assail-

ant at arm's-length, while flourishing his heavy cane as though to brain her; "hag! marplot! off, or—"

But some words that she hissed in reply seemed to suddenly appall him.

"Villain! murderer of Joel Redfield?" were the words. "Think you the vengeance of heaven must forever sleep?"

He recoiled, blanching, and gazing at her with staring eyes.

"Who and what are you?" he faltered, in a hollow voice.

But Mrs. Forsyth waited not to reply, and, perceiving that both Harold and the Irishman were again getting the better of their immediate adversaries, she hastened to clamber to the trembling Marion's side, while still brandishing the fragments of her parasol victoriously.

"Quick, sor!" shouted Kelly, dropping his man by a well-directed blow of his loaded whip. "We've basted 'em so far, but they may still be too many for us."

With that, he drew a knife, severing one of the traces of the enemy's team, and then, springing to the box of his own coach, gathered up the lines in a twinkling.

Harold at the same instant got in with the ladies. In another moment, with a creak, a scramble of hoofs, and a crack of the whip, they were off.

"After 'em!" yelled Bernard, rallying his discomfited forces. "A hundred dollars if you overtake 'em!"

And then a glimpse was caught from the fugitive coach of the villains repairing damages, and getting under way with astonishing rapidity.

The entire affray had not occupied more than three minutes.

"Oh, Harold, you are bleeding!" exclaimed Marion, whose nerve seemed to return to her when out of her hated guardian's presence.

"It is nothing," he said, wiping a little blood from his face, and with a glad heart-leap at her having called him by his first name. "Drive straight northward, Kelly!" he added, addressing the driver. "We've kept clear of the authorities so far, and," with a side-glance at Marion, "we might as well keep our own counsel to the end."

Marion thanked him with a look.

"All right, sor," was the Irishman's response; "shtraight ahead it is till the horses drop."

"Mr. Harcourt," said Mrs. Forsyth, "I have already arranged a safe retreat for Miss Moreton."

"Where is it?" cried Harold. "Quick!" he added, straining his eyes backward through the dusk. "They are after us, full tilt, and their horses are better than ours."

"Near a boat-house at the East River, foot of One Hundred and Twenty-first street," was the reply.

"Ha! And in cutting across Harlem they may be able to intercept us. Can the place be reached by boat?"

"Yes; though circuitously."

"Straight on, then, to Macomb's Dam Bridge, Kelly!" called out Harold. "I know the boat-keeper there. We can transfer the scene to the river in a jiffy."

Away they whirled, out of the Park, up the arrow-straight roadway of upper Seventh avenue, and with their pursuers still in chase.

But they reached the Macomb's Dam, or Central Bridge, and the transfer from coach to boat was speedily effected, with Harold and Kelly at the oars—the latter having sheltered his team at a convenient tavern, and sworn that he would see the adventure through, come what might.

The placid bosom of the Harlem was alive with row-boats and pleasure-craft, while softly reflecting the newly-appearing stars, as our fugitives pressed down the stream with long, vigorous strokes.

"The omadhoons must have given up the chase," cried Kelly, at length. "There's divil a sign of any boat following."

But just as they were nearing the railroad bridge at the head of Fourth avenue, Marion pointed excitedly over the water.

"No, no! See; they have headed us off!" she screamed. "There they come!"

And, sure enough, a large, swiftly-propelled row-boat, containing their pursuers, was seen to shoot out from the southern shore.

"Pull away, Kelly!" shouted Harold. "Look out for that steam-launch, though. If we only—"

Here his oar snapped in twain, and Marion gave a despairing cry.

"Back oars, there!" called out Bernard's hated voice, close at hand. "A hundred dollars for the girl's seizure!"

Then one of his hands was on the gunwale of the crippled boat, a revolver glistened in the other, and it was leveled at Harold's breast.

CHAPTER VII.

A SNUG RETREAT.

MRS. FORSYTH'S sun-umbrella was still an energetic force in reserve.

Down it came, with a swish and a whack, knocking Bernard's leveled revolver to one side,

and then falling fast and furiously upon that person's dignified head, while Harold and Kelly lost no time in clubbing their oars and using them with vigor and dispatch upon the Guernseys, whose oarsmen were at first too overcome by surprise to take a hand in the scrimmage.

"Jump into their boat!" whispered Mrs. Forsyth to Harold, without remitting her demonstrations. "Leave Marion and me to shift for ourselves. You will know where to look for us."

Harold understood her, and passed the word to Kelly.

Then they both leaped into the row-boat with such violence as to start the seams of her planks, while still keeping up their showering blows; and, as the smaller boat containing Mrs. Forsyth and Marion was recoiling back, the former managed to possess herself of a pair of sculls from the other craft, with which she at once began to pull away with surprising skill and vigor.

By the time the five men of the row-boat had rallied effectively against the boarding assault, which they were soon enabled to do, the fugitives were well on their way down the river, besides being mixed up with a number of other crafts that were rushing to the scene of the disturbance.

"Oh, dear me! how awful it all is!" faltered Marion. "Dear Mrs. Forsyth, it seems like a dream. Where did you learn to row a boat so splendidly?"

"Never mind that just now, my dear," replied the elder woman, still bending successfully to the oars. "Here we are nearly to the Third Avenue Bridge. Strain your eyes back over the water, and tell me how the battle is going with our brave friends."

"As near as I can make out," said Marion, "Mr. Harcourt and the coachman have been overpowered, and the row-boat is sinking. But they are surrounded by a regular flotilla of little boats, and cannot be in any danger of drowning. Ah! now they are—"

Here her view was interrupted by the boat passing under the bridge, and a few more strokes enabled them to effect a landing at the boating-float that has so long been established at the southeast corner of the bridge entrance.

This place was fortunately deserted for the moment, by reason of the excitement incidental to the disturbance still going on up the river.

"Come!" cried Mrs. Forsyth, leading the way to the ascending steps. "Follow me, Marion, and ask no questions till we are safe beyond pursuit."

"But will that ever be, think you?" asked the young girl, obeying orders.

"Yes, yes; you shall see."

They soon mingled with the throngs about the bridge entrance, and then, after a brisk but more leisurely walk, reached the retreat of which the forewoman had spoken.

It was a snug little isolated cottage on the water's edge, in the midst of a wilderness of lumber-yards, coal-docks and neglected wharves, but with a quaint garden or yard of its own, much of whose space was occupied by high and dry small boats of various descriptions, old, new and indifferent stages of completion, for a boat-builder's shop was close at hand, where Tom and Jerry Cleaver, sons of the widowed occupant of the cottage, plied their trade.

Mrs. Cleaver made the fugitives welcome, and Mrs. Forsyth, for whom she seemed to have a great deal of respect, at once explained the object of their visit.

"I shall be happy to take Miss Moreton as a temporary boarder," assured the widow, "and I don't doubt that she will be able to find with me the seclusion and security she requires. Pray, take a look at the room I can offer you." And she turned to Marion with an engaging frankness and sympathy that went far to winning the young woman's confidence.

Everything proved satisfactory, and they were discussing the details by which Marion should make the cottage her temporary home, when an odd little boy of three or four years came toddling into the room with a crow of delight.

"Hooray! we've dot tump'any, ain't we granny?" he chirped out, executing a little pirouette with his queer little legs, while flourishing a broken toy in either fist. "Gimme some tandy, please! I'll be a dood boy, if you gimme some tandy; but if you don't, I'll holler and yell. Hooray! at's dood. I love you an' so I tell you!" And he straightway made friends with Marion, who had given him a few gum-drops from the bottom of her pocket.

The widow smiled a little confusedly, though she did not seem particularly fond of the child, and she presently carried him off to bed, with an intimation that she would quickly return and explain matters.

Marion at once manifested an agitation, which up to this moment she had succeeded in controlling.

"This place would be no retreat for me, my dear friend," she said. "I am sure of it."

"What is the matter now?" asked Mrs. For-

syth, in no little surprise. "I know Mrs. Cleaver thoroughly, and she is, moreover, under obligations to me. You will not be molested here."

"I feel that it would be otherwise. You are deceiving yourself. The child—"

"Ah! is it the child, then?"

"Yes."

"Explain, my dear Marion."

"You know what I have told you in confidence of the secret relations between Fanny Harcourt and that rascally Albert Guernsey?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is the child that she has hidden away from him, under the pretense that it is dead!"

"Impossible!"

"I tell you, I know it!"

"But how?"

"I at once recognized the poor little fellow as the original of the photograph that the policeman picked up in Miss Harcourt's room on that dreadful night when they were searching for the supposed burglar."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. There can be no mistake. The child was a little younger when the picture was taken, but it is the same. See the danger I would incur in remaining here! Miss Harcourt is necessarily in communication with the woman here, and, as Albert is desirous of discovering the whereabouts of the child—for he has never believed a word of her assertions concerning its death, depend on it—I would also be in constant danger of discovery here."

Mrs. Forsyth had grown very thoughtful. She had only just time to say, "Trust to my discretion, and leave it all to me," when the widow came bustling back.

The latter at once perceived that something was amiss, and she interrogated them with a look of unaffected surprise.

"What child is that, Elizabeth?" asked Mrs. Forsyth, in her downright way. "I must tell you frankly that if I had known of your having any mystery on hand, I would have thought twice before bringing Miss Moreton to your protection in her present distress."

"And you'd have been right, ma'm," said the widow, composedly. "But let me tell you what I know about Snipsey—which is, oddly enough, the only name by which I know the child—and you can judge for yourself how much mystery is connected with him."

She then went on to say that the child had been left at her door a few months previously, together with a small bundle of clothes, and a brief note, inclosing a ten-dollar bill, to the effect that the youngster was to be called Snipsey and that a like amount would be sent by mail at the first of every month thereafter for his maintenance.

"It was a bitter cold night," said the widow, "and there the little mite stood shivering in the doorway with his bundle at his side. 'Who fetched you here, Snipsey?' I asked, after warming him up at the stove and examining the contents of the bundle and the note that was inside of it. 'Mammy,' said he, just as sharp and distinct as he talks now. 'Mammy took me here, ma'm. She's a bad 'un, too; an' so I tell you!' He wasn't pretty to look at, no more than he is now, but I couldn't help laughing at his pert and old-manish way. I happened to be very needy just then, and as neither of my boys had any objection to offer when they came home for the night, I determined to keep the waif for at least a month and see what would come of it. Well, ma'm, I've been keeping him ever since, and have never yet missed getting the money regular at the first of every month, just as was promised. That is all the mystery about Snipsey, and now you and Miss Moreton know as much of it as I do."

"It is a strange story," said Mrs. Forsyth, reflectively. "You've no idea, then, of the mother's identity?"

"No more than you can have, ma'm. The note inclosing the first bank-note was scribbled in lead-pencil and was unsigned. All the other inclosures have come through the letter-carrier in the ordinary way, inclosed in a blank sheet of note-paper, with no sign of writing apart from the address on the envelope."

"Was the first envelope addressed to you by name?"

"Yes, ma'm, and correctly so. That is the strangest part about it; for I had never taken a child to board in all my born days before, and can't imagine how the unnatural mother of Snipsey could have hit upon me as a likely person to rid her of the child in this instance."

"You don't apprehend, then, that the boy will ever be called for?"

"Not by the mother, at least, and I can't gather from Snipsey's limited recollections that any one else was ever interested in him. Besides, I fancy that the mother would sooner hear of his death than otherwise, hard as it seems to have such an opinion of any woman whatever."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, from the boy's rambling talk, I imagine he was ill-treated by his mother, and then, if the truth must be told, Snipsey isn't at

all lovable. You may have noticed that I didn't betray any special affection for him?"

"I did notice that."

"I can't get up any warmth of feeling for the little fellow, though I conscientiously do for him to the best of my lights. In spite of his cunning and quaint ways, the child seems to me to have many vicious and depraved traits, that are perfectly incorrigible. However, I am never otherwise than kind to him."

Here Mrs. Cleaver's two sons, stalwart, honest-appearing mechanics, returned home, and were introduced to Miss Moreton, with some words as to her recent adventure.

"So," said Tom, "you ladies are the ones who were connected with that boat-fight? Jerry and I both witnessed something of it from the bridge."

"What was the result after our escape?" asked Marion, anxiously.

"Oh, the police took a hand in it, as a matter of course, and the entire party were carried off to the station. You followed 'em there, Jerry."

"Yes," supplemented the brother. "The attacking party—that is, the pompous-looking old fellow, with the gold-headed cane, and his gang—were compelled to send for a magistrate to see 'em through with the police-captain, while the young gentleman who had had the ladies under his care was doing his best to have 'em held to account for their fun. That was about the size of it when I left."

This was somewhat cheering, and it was made yet more so a few minutes later, after the stalwart brothers had retired, by the arrival of Harold Harcourt himself.

He reported that Bernard had succeeded in getting himself and his friends out of the complication through political influence with a justice of the peace, who had come to his aid, after which he had been sent about his business, with a cautioning reprimand on the part of the police-captain. Then Kelly had slipped away to look after his horses, while Harold, remembering Mrs. Forsyth's directions, had hurried on to the cottage.

Fortunately, neither he nor the coachman had sustained any damage beyond a wetting, though both the Guernseys and their two oarsmen had received more or less bruised heads, while Bernard had escaped with merely a ducking.

It was now determined that Mrs. Forsyth should keep Marion company at the cottage throughout the night, after which the young man took his departure, with the understanding that he would call again on the following day.

When he did so, he found Marion in better spirits.

She had decided upon remaining in seclusion with Mrs. Cleaver indefinitely, and the good forewoman had already seen to sending her the greater part of her belongings from the Sixth avenue boarding-house.

Still, the young girl was, naturally enough, though retaining much of her reserve, considerably troubled in her mind regarding the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAROLD LEARNS A SECRET.

"I HAVE saved up enough money to enable me to remain here a few weeks," said Marion, simply, "and Mrs. Forsyth thinks she can get me some law-copying to do. But, I am chiefly concerned, Mr. Harcourt, as to the inconvenience I must cause you by so suddenly quitting my post in your work-rooms."

"That can't be helped, and we shall manage to rub along somehow till you can return," Harold assured her.

"I shall not return to the book-binding," declared Marion. "It will not be safe for me to do so, as long as—as that terrible man remains in the city, and I am certain he will never cease trying to hunt me down."

It was about noon, and they were alone in Mrs. Cleaver's little parlor, which looked out over the odd boat-garden, as it might be called, upon the surface of the river.

Harold gazed out of the window without replying, and then turned to her in sudden passion and entreaty.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, brokenly; "why do you treat me in this way, when I love you so dearly, so devotedly?"

She caught her breath.

"You—you promised not to speak of that again," she murmured, vainly striving to maintain her composure.

"But how can I help it, when the mere sight of you causes me a nameless tumult? Marion, confide in me! I love you most devotedly, and you—you do not regard me with absolute indifference! Your words and your manner during those exciting scenes of last evening conveyed that much of joy to me. Let there be no more of this mystery between us. I would guard and protect you, not blindly, but intelligently. I infer that you have already told your story to Mrs. Forsyth; trust also in me, I beseech you."

She clasped her hands hard over her lap, and averted her face, so that he could not mark its expression, though he felt that tears were silently gushing from her beautiful eyes.

"Why would you know my history?" she asked

at last, in a low, steady voice, still without looking up.

"Because I love you."

"You have told me that. But why otherwise, I mean?"

"Because—" he hesitated—"because, if sorrow, distress, or even ignominy threatens you, I would share your burden or bear it for you."

"Ignominy?"

"Yes; I will conceal nothing from you. That man Bernard threw out dark hints against you at the station-house last night, and he seemed to be supported in everything by those two ruffians who gave their names as Guernsey."

"What sort of hints?"

"The vaguest kind, but none the less affecting your—your honesty."

She looked up, her face ablaze with indignation, her bosom heaving angrily; but she still managed to control herself, and to once more avert her face.

"Mr. Harcourt—Harold," she murmured, "supposing that this man spoke the truth—supposing that my past conduct may not have been blameless—may even have been the very reverse—what would you then think and feel toward me?"

He fell upon his knees and seized her hand, covering it with his kisses, in spite of her resistance.

"I would still love and adore you!" came from him in broken words. "Still, still, in any event!"

"But if I should prove deservedly friendless and miserable, just as when you first found me—nameless, helpless—alone in New York?"

"I would love you all the dearer for it, Marion! I would win and wear you as the bright breast-jewel of my love, my fortune and my life!"

She was not proof against a love so unselfish, a devotion so perfect.

"Oh, Harold, I love you!" and she sunk weeping into his embrace. "They have lied about me, dear—the cowards! They would render me yet more defenseless and miserable with their calumnies. But I will tell you all, Harold! It is not with a stain of slander upon my name that you shall take me to your noble heart. Yes; I shall tell you all, and you shall judge if I am sinning or sinned against."

Transported, he could but strain her to his breast; but she blushing disengaged herself.

And then she gave him her history as unreservedly as she had already given it to Mrs. Forsyth.

"I am filled with surprise!" he exclaimed when there was nothing more to tell.

"At what?" she asked; "at the sadness of it all?"

"No, though it is sad and romantic enough, this story of yours, my darling. But why could you not have told it to me before? It is your hesitation up to this late day that surprises me. There is nothing that you need be ashamed of in your story."

"No, there is not."

"Why did you not confide in me before, then?"

She was once more bending down her head and clasping her hands in her lap.

"How could I trust you at the very outset?" she pleaded, in a low voice. "I was in fear of my very shadow. Friendless, almost helpless, I was left solely to my own poor resources—I was, indeed, as I felt—alone in the great city!"

"But, after that, I mean—after you must have known that I loved you?"

"Ah, then, indeed, I hesitated all the more to tell you my story."

And her voice was now scarcely audible.

"But, why? Marion, life of my life! Will you not tell me why?"

"Because—because I wanted you to love me, not as the runaway heiress, but as the poor, the unfriended working-girl. It was so sweet to—to belong for one's self alone, especially by—you, whom I had—had come to love almost from the first moment."

Again, with a glad cry, he clasped her to his heart.

"Oh, this is too dear—too perfect a happiness!" he cried, amid the kisses that he showered, regardless of her feeble protests, upon her brow, lips, cheeks, and upon the soft little hands that would seemingly have thrust him back. "Have I been lonely all these years, to find this great bliss at last? If it is a dream, then let me nevermore awake! What, did your heart really go out to me, as mine to you, from the very first?"

Yes; she timidly confessed it, even while again withdrawing, gently, but firmly, from his passionate caresses. On that first night, when he had come to her rescue in Reservoir Park and had stood so carelessly brave and manful between her and her enemies, she had felt instinctively that his presence was her fate, the sweet, the thrilling fate that is womanhood's but once in a lifetime, and is thenceforward her happiness or shipwreck.

Friendless and alone in the metropolitan wilderness by night, she had been sought out and found by her emotional destiny, and, though she knew it not then save by dim, hardly-understood promptings, she now recognized that it was the

coming of her prince, and did not shrink from the blushing avowal, if it might give him fresh joy and hope.

"But now let us consider my position," said Marion, hurriedly returning to the more prosaic business of life. "Do you think Mrs. Forsyth will be able to get me the copying to do, so that I can remain here in seclusion for a time?"

"With my assistance, yes. And of course, since I know your desire to be independent, the work you wish shall be forthcoming. But you are still determined to avoid your uncle, rather than confront him publicly?"

"Yes, oh, yes! Should he again get me in his power—the very thought of it makes me shudder!"

"But you would not fear him if you were of age, I understand?"

"Not so much as now, at least; it would then be his turn to fear me in an unequivocal way, not as he half-fears me now."

"Ah!"

"Yes; he will strain every nerve to get me in his power before my twenty-first birthday. After that, I shall be my own mistress, with the power of at once interesting the law in my behalf."

"When will that be?"

"The twelfth of next October."

"And now we are in the middle of May. Plenty of time for Bernard to plot, plan and contrive any number of villainies against you!"

"Yes, oh, yes!"

"And I may be kept busy enough in foiling him. But, be of good heart, Marion; he shall none the less be foiled."

"Oh, I hope so, Harold!"

"I tell you, it shall be done. Now, you will not think me unduly inquisitive or impertinent if I question you as to certain details?"

"You impertinent?"

"Well, how great is your fortune, which this man is so anxious to get wholly under his control?"

"I don't know exactly, but I have heard that it is worth half a million. Much of it is in farms and other real estate in the town of Richburg."

"Humph! Truly a sufficient temptation for such a villain's cupidity. Now, as to these Guernseys, who are they?"

"The elder has long been a tool of my uncle's. As I have told you, I have reason to believe that he either murdered Mr. Redfield, or was an accessory to his murder, in my unfortunate mother's presence, and was subsequently, if not so still, my mother's jailer up there in the vicinity of Lake George. I gathered this terrible knowledge from conversations that I overheard between him and my guardian. It is my possession of this secret that causes my guardian to fear me, no less than he hates me."

"What of the younger rascal—Albert Guernsey he called himself at the police station?"

Marion deliberated.

She was too magnanimous to give away Fanny Harcourt's secret to her brother, and yet she was unwilling to deceive the man who was now become the dearest being on earth to her.

"I never knew or heard of him before my arrival here in New York," she answered, after a pause.

"What! you knew of him before our adventure of last night?"

"Yes."

"When, where and how had you first seen him?"

"I prefer not to answer, unless you shall insist upon it."

"I would like to insist upon it."

She bowed her head with a sweet submissiveness that overjoyed him.

"I shall answer," said she, "but with a certain right of reservation that will some time be explained to you."

"And welcome."

"I saw Albert Guernsey first on the night that brought you and me so fatefully together. I saw him twice on that night."

He was regarding her with a troubled look, as though he feared what was coming.

"Shall I go on?"

"Yes, yes; by all means."

"I saw him twice that night. First, when you were gone for the dipper of water, after rescuing me from those ruffians in Reservoir Square. Without perceiving me, he was passing in conversation with a companion—a woman—after having had some connection with my would-be abductors."

"What companion—what woman?"

"I decline to tell you."

"Very good. Pray go on."

"I saw him next, some hours later, when passing through my room. He was the mysterious burglar for whom search was made in vain."

"Ha! good heavens! my sister must have some secret knowledge of this man. I recall it all now—the fallen photograph—her perturbation—the locked wardrobe drawers—everything!"

He looked at her with mingled shame and inquiry, but she volunteered nothing.

"And this disreputable hound," he went on, "must have tossed into Fanny's room the pebble-weighted scrawl, whose chance discovery by me

put me on the track of the plot to carry you off night before last!"

He produced the paper, which he had secretly retained, and handed it to Marion.

"How bitterly and unreasonably your sister must hate me!" was her only comment, as she read and returned the telltale missive. "I can't understand it."

"I can!" and his brow darkened. "From her childhood up, Fanny has been mean-souled and ungovernable. Her hatred is but her natural enviousness of one so much purer, better and more beautiful than herself. It isn't my first occasion for being ashamed of her. Only now—Good God, she is still my sister!"

The color deepened in his manly face, and he was placing his hand distractedly to his forehead, when the sweet girl took it in hers with an earnestness and commiseration that was like a Samaritan caress.

"You are more than good, you are noble!" said he, kissing her, and recovering his self-possession. "Marion, my best beloved! what is even a brother's shame, when counterbalanced by such love as yours? God be praised, that I have found and won the rich jewel of your love!"

A sweet content stole into the young girl's erst desolate heart, which even the perils of her still precarious situation could not overshadow.

"I remember it all now," continued Harold. "The rascal stole through your apartment—that it was that caused you to give the alarm?"

"Yes; though most unwillingly at the moment."

He looked at her in renewed surprise.

"Unwillingly?"

"Yes; it was only your mother's voice, calling out to me from the adjoining room that caused me to alarm the household so suddenly." And she told him of what had taken place between her and the intruder in the brief interval.

"I can well imagine how your curiosity must have been excited by the fellow's perturbation," said Harold, to whom much was now explained. "It was your resemblance to your mother that so appalled him."

"Yes."

"And he spoke of her as the dead-alive?"

"Yes."

"What do you infer from that?"

"That he, at all events, imagines her dead. He was on the point of some revelation, from which, as you have seen, I necessarily debarred myself by raising the alarm. Your mother's frightened inquiry left me no alternative."

"I understand. But may not your mother really be dead?"

"I think not. Now that I know the relationship between the young man and the elder Guernsey, much that was before a mystery becomes less vague to me. There is no love lost between them, depend on it; and their recent co-operation with my guardian in the plot to carry me off proves nothing more than a transient use that the elder villains may have made of the younger one. Old Guernsey might well have told his son years ago that my mother was dead, in order to get rid of some inconvenient curiosity on his part."

"I believe you. A woman's intuition is better than logic in such matters. I must now be going. Mrs. Forsyth will call upon you this evening. One thing more, Marion; Mrs. Forsyth said something about your fearing to remain here, because of Mrs. Cleaver having already taken a little boy to board."

"Let that pass. I am easier in my mind now."

"But how could the youngster's presence have excited your suspicions?"

Marion was still determined to keep what was left of Fanny Harcourt's secret from her brother's knowledge.

"That I would rather not tell you," she answered, in a low voice. "Indeed, for that matter, I shall not tell you."

But at this instant Snipsey himself came breaking into the room, like a miniature cyclone.

"Hooray!" he chirped, grabbing at Marion's skirts, with a charming disregard of the strange gentleman's presence; "tum do a-fishin', Missy Mo'ton. The river's full of fishes, an' so I tell you!"

Harold had also seen the photograph picked up by the policeman in his sister's room, and a single glance at the child was sufficient.

"My question is already answered," said he, turning pale, and taking up his hat. "Marion, your magnanimity is simply angelic. Good-by, and God bless you!"

And with a parting pressure of the hand he was gone, taking with him a pain-drawn, humiliated face that caused her heart to bleed for him.

CHAPTER IX.

A HOPELESS PASSION.

MARION in a few days found herself comfortably installed in her little out-of-the-way Harlem retreat, with all the law-copying she could do at a fairly remunerative rate, for she wrote an exquisite hand, bold and masculine, clear as copper-plate, and with equal rapidity and precision.

The removal of her wardrobe to her new abode had been effected with the utmost secrecy; Mrs. Forsyth only visited her often enough to facilitate the copying business, and then with many precautions against being tracked; Harold, as a matter of prudence, was induced, though sorely against his inclinations, to abstain from coming at all until the coast should have become clear; Mrs. Cleaver was kind, discreet and motherly; her stalwart boat-builders were men to be safely intrusted with the knowledge that a certain amount of secrecy was indispensable to their mother's pretty boarder, though Jerry, the younger, was uncomfortably smitten with her beauty from the start; the lonely little boy, Snipsey, was found, upon further acquaintance, to be less depraved and untractable than good but somewhat sympathetic Mrs. Cleaver had described him; and altogether, apart from the anxiety and discontent natural to her situation, Marion was not long in finding it endurable.

One beautiful afternoon she was strolling listlessly through the odd little garden, with the irrepressible Snipsey at her side.

Her surroundings were rather the reverse of romantic.

The voices of workmen and the clatter of boards were heard from among the neighboring lumber piles, and the occasional sights offered by the little-frequented street on which the garden fronted were of the most uninteresting and prosaic description.

But then, as a pleasing offset, the broad and beautiful tidal river, dotted here and there with little pleasure-boats, with an occasional tug or passenger-steamer puffing past, lapped the rear of the grounds with laughing wavelets, though flanked on either side by ugly wharves piled with lumber, bricks, lime and other building material, and strung along with schooners and canal-boats, for the most part uninteresting and deserted-looking.

Now and then there came strains of band-music from an invisible beer-garden at the edge of the water not very far away. Then there were sufficient evidences of her beauty's conquest near at hand, as Jerry Cleaver would occasionally, hammer or saw in hand, peer wistfully out at her from the boat-house in which his brother and he were more or less industriously at work.

Presently Marion seated herself near the water, and a great and overpowering sadness came over her.

The distant band-music had struck up a lively waltz measure. For a moment her youth and natural liveliness of temperament had asserted themselves in an overmastering desire to be in the whirl of the giddy dance—anywhere out and away amid the scenes of joyousness, to which she had at one time been so little a stranger—to mingle with flying feet, sparkling eyes and palpitating heart among gay companions of her own age.

To this had succeeded the dull, iron consciousness of her present helpless, ignoble situation, with a contrasting bitterness which even her love for Harold Harcourt, novel and sweet as she had found it, could not for the moment compensate.

Could he have been with her every day, it might have been different; but now—with even the consolations of his love debarred to her—shut away, perhaps indefinitely, by the necessities of her peril-girt position, that were so insatiable and remorseless.

Tears coursed their way down her beautiful face, and even the soft ripple of the water at her feet sounded mockingly and mournfully in her ears.

She was aroused from her unpleasant reflections by the voice of the child, who had wearied of sailing chips, and was pointing out over the river.

"Look, Missy Mo'ton, look!" he piped. "Manny in sail-boat! What he do with cannons at his face?"

Marion looked, and then slipped out of sight behind a high and dry yawl near at hand, pulling the little fellow after her.

The child's description applied to a man, with a pair of opera-glasses, who was scanning objects alongshore with apparent carelessness from a pretty cat-rigged yacht, managed by two other men, that was but a short distance off the ends of the long lumber wharves.

The distance was considerable, but Marion had, nevertheless, recognized, or thought she recognized, the observant stranger as her arch-enemy, Bernard, and his companions as the two Guernseys.

"Hush! keep quiet! Remain out of sight here with me!" she excitedly exclaimed, though Snipsey kicked and struggled vigorously at being thus hidden away from the bright water-view. "Bad men in the little ship! Maybe they want to carry you off!"

"I don't tare!" squeaked Snipsey, struggling afresh. "Me want to see, an' so I tell you!"

But, frightened as she was on her own account, Marion persisted in her efforts to quiet the child, and was presently successful.

"Listen, Snipsey," said she, kissing him.

"Would you really like bad men to carry you off, far away from your pretty home here?"

"But where to?" queried the child. "Tell me that first, Missy Mo'ton. Where would they tarry me to?"

"I don't know." And then a sudden thought struck her. "Perhaps back again to your mamma. How would you like that?"

"Oh!" And the impish little figure now cuddled unresistingly at her side. "Not back to mamma! I hate mamma! Mamma tan't tum take me away, an' so I tell you. You love me, don't you? You won't let her, Missy Mo'ton, will you?"

The child had manifested a great attachment for Marion, which she returned with all the pitying kindness in her power, and he now hugged her closely with his little arms.

She continued to soothe him with gentle words, and now perceived, to her great relief, that the opera-glass was no longer leveled, while its owner and the men with him seemed to be fishing with trolling lines.

She was presently sure of this, and even became partly convinced that the survey with the glass had merely been an idle one, or at least that she had not been desecrated; and in a few minutes the boat, which was moving slowly before the light wind, disappeared altogether around the angle of the upper wharf.

"Tum out now!" cried Snipsey, who had also been on the watch. "Bad men gone away. Tum!"

Still trembling from her recent alarm, Marion did come out with him from behind the boat, taking a long breath of semi-relief.

As she did so, Jerry Cleaver, who had come out of the shop, with a hammer still in his hand, his paper cap and striped workman's apron covered with fine cedar dust and shavings, approached her with a rather sheepish smile.

He was a splendidly-built young fellow, with a frank, handsome face, crisp-curling fair beard, and pleasant blue eyes. Indeed, any pretty girl might have gone far without finding a better-looking or more manly and engaging lover than he, and for him, poor fellow! Harold Harcourt's prior claim was an unknown quantity as yet, in the soft arithmetic of his desires and aspirations.

Jerry tossed the child, with whom he was likewise a favorite, a bright new nickel, and as Snipsey made a break for the nearest candy stand, with the most enthusiastic "Hooray!" in his juvenile vocabulary, Marion felt that something was preparing for her.

Nor was her discernment at fault.

"I saw it all, Miss Moreton," said the tall artisan, breathlessly, as soon as the lad was out of the way, "I saw it all."

"Saw what, Jerry?"

"The fellers in the boat, and you a-bidin' from 'em!" he went on, eagerly. "One of 'em, at least—the big 'un with the gunnin'-tubes to his eyes—was the one of those from whom you escaped up above the bridge on the night you first came here. I had a good look at him that night, and I can't be mistaken."

This much of her mystery might very well be known to both Jerry and his brother, so that there was nothing startling in the former's words.

"I can tell you more than that, Jerry," added Marion, smiling, for she had now thoroughly recovered her composure. "All three of the men, I am satisfied, were identical with those who tried to carry me off on that occasion. I only hope they did not recognize me, in turn, before I slipped out of sight."

The stalwart young fellow scratched his head with a half-disappointed look.

"I don't know whether they did or not," he reluctantly admitted.

"Then you see you have brought me no great piece of news, after all," remarked Marion, with another smile, which seemed to say on its own part, "So, what are you here for, anyway?"

"I do see it now, ma'am," assented Jerry, still more crestfallenly.

"However, you intended very kindly," she continued, and was turning away.

"That I did, miss—I'll swear to that, miss! Don't be in a hurry, please. My only intention was to let you know that I'm on the lookout for you; that—that, in case of an emergency, you can count on me every time; and—and there ain't a man along this water-front, if I do say it as I hadn't ought to, who can put up his hands against me, perhaps Brother Tom alone excepted. There, now! But wait a bit."

The honest fellow had grown awkwardly radiant, and was fumbling under his striped apron for something in one of his trousers-pockets.

Indeed, his desire to make love to her was so obvious that Marion at once grew serious, if not annoyed, in spite of a first inclination to laugh outright.

She was about to check him gently but indubitably, when he produced a show-bill, illustrated with a conventional engraving of two contestants in pugilistic costume and attitude, which he tendered to her with a diffident, but at the same time proud little flourish.

"There you are, miss!" said he, quite beamingly.

"What is it?" she asked, with a suspicious twitching at the corners of her mouth.

"Me and 'Longshoreman Jake! That's the

way we appeared in our big go before the Harlem Boating Club, which was even noticed in the *Herald* and reported at length in the *Police Gazette*. A friendly bout, miss, a friendly bout! but—with becoming modesty and off-handedness—"Jake was knocked out in the third round."

"Ah, indeed?"

And Marion had the hardest sort of work to abstain from a peal of heartfelt laughter.

"Oh, yes!" indifferently. "And I might also show you the bill of the sculling-match last fall, in which Tom and I rowed right around Sam and Enoch Cutway, the Spuyten Duyvil Wonders, only Tom was in that, too, you see, and it wasn't illustrated."

"You should be proud of such manful laurels, Mr. Cleaver," said Marion, still preserving her gravity while handing back the show-bill. "I congratulate you, I am sure."

"Oh, it isn't that!" he stammered, a little abashed by the "Mr. Cleaver," in lieu of the more familiar "Jerry." "Indeed, I wasn't fishin' for compliments, miss, but only—only—Oh, hang it all! I merely want to show you that I'm a good 'un, miss—besides worshipin' the very dirt you tread on—and in case of an emergency risin', why—why—"

He got over his blushing entanglement by rolling his shirt-sleeves still higher above his elbows, to the yet more attractive display of his bare arms, which were superb specimens of masculine muscularity.

"You are extremely kind," said Marion, quietly. "I shall not forget your proffered championship, should occasion arise, and Mr. Harcourt will also be glad to hear of it."

"Mr. Harcourt?"

"Yes," easily. "But I forget that you have not perhaps met him."

"Oh! the—the young gentleman mother kinder mentioned as rescuin' you an' the elderly lady from them hounds, an' who follered you here the first night?"

"Yes; the gentleman to whom I am engaged."

"Engaged?"

The broken, dazed manner in which he repeated the word touched her heart. But before she could summon up anything in the soothing line he had turned slowly and was going back to the shop.

She watched him, a little remorsefully, as he disappeared, though in reality there was no occasion for self-reproach. But she had to acknowledge that he was a splendid man, whose honest heart any right-minded young girl might be proud to win; and there is yet to be found an involuntary admiration, howsoever humble and untutored, that is not dear to maidenhood even in its most aspiring flush.

But Marion was speedily recalled to herself by hearing Snipsey's voice at this juncture in angry expostulation with a handsomely-dressed, vailed lady who had followed him to the front gate from the candy-stand.

"Don't tum in here!" screamed the child. "I don't like you, I hate you! I'll make Tom and Jerry kill you dead if you tum in here, and so I tell you."

But the visitor insisted on caressing the child, and was coming with him around the cottage toward the back of the garden in spite of his protestations.

"I shall only stop a minute or two, Snipsey," said she, in mingled grief and tenderness. "Come back here, away from the street. How do you know that I have not something for you far nicer than that sticky candy? One would think you were afraid of me!"

"Do away from here!" persisted Snipsey. "I am afraid, and so I tell you!"

"Hush, hush! That is naughty and unkind. Am I not your mamma, and are you not my little darling? Come along!"

"No, I'm not. I hate you! I'm Miss Moreton's darling!"

Marion's first impulse was to seek concealment, but she, nevertheless, stepped out and confronted the woman complacently as she approached the water's edge, dragging the unwilling Snipsey by the hand.

"Miss Moreton!" exclaimed the woman, with unaffected surprise. "You here?"

"Yes, Miss Harcourt," answered Marion, quietly, "I am here."

Fanny raised her vail in much embarrassment, which was greatly increased by the conduct of Snipsey, who at this moment ran to Marion, as if for protection from some threatening calamity.

CHAPTER X.

AGAIN IN THE TOILS.

"MAKE her go away!" whimpered the child, clinging to Marion's skirts. "It's my bad mamma; I hate her! Don't let her tarry me off, Missy Moreton!"

Marion disengaged herself, and signed the little fellow to resume his sailing of the chips, which he did very perfunctorily, and yet with a docility that could not but strike his mother unpleasantly.

She bit her lip, while Marion retained her rather contemptuous composure.

Whatever had been Fanny's object in seeking out her neglected offspring to-day for the first time, she had instinctively divined something of the situation so far as Marion was concerned, and to say that she was no little perturbed thereat is to but mildly describe her feelings.

"I heard of your disappearance, after the infamous attempt to carry you off, Miss Moreton, as who has not who reads the newspapers?" said she at last, with studied deliberation, the better to recover her usual audacity. "But I confess to being totally unprepared for finding you here."

"It should not be so surprising, Mrs. Guernsey, I should think," said Marion. "That is, apart from the mere coincidence of the thing."

Fanny started as if stung.

"Why do you call me—that is, how do you know about me?" she exclaimed, in a sudden terror.

"I have known of it from the start—from the first hour of my arrival in New York," said Marion, coldly, and without an atom of exultation. "I unintentionally overheard your altercation with Albert Guernsey in Reservoir Park, after your brother had rescued me from the first ruffianly, though mistaken, attempt against my liberty."

Audacity! Fanny had need enough for all she could muster now. Her face was burning as she sunk upon an extemporized seat near at hand.

"What! you overheard that?" she feebly stammered.

"Yes; after which the episode of the burglar hunt in your mother's house explained itself—as the photograph incident was destined to do somewhat later." And Marion gave a quick glance at the child, which was more than understood.

Fanny's humiliating enlightenment was almost complete. She was crushed almost beyond the rallying point; but as there was nothing to do but rally, she did so, after a poor, halting fashion.

"Does my brother suspect anything?" she managed to ask.

"He has been here but twice, but it was enough, for he saw the child. Otherwise, I should have kept your secret."

"You?"

"Certainly; though it may seem strange to you."

Fanny could not but recognize the exceptional magnanimity that Marion had displayed, though somehow it made her hate her more than ever. In fact, she was fairly boiling over with mortification and spite, which, however, she was prudent enough to dissimulate.

"You—you were very kind and forbearing to have spared me as long as you did," said she, still faintly. "Miss Moreton, I owe you many apologies."

"Pray spare me the apologies, if you would offer them with no intention of amendment," said Marion, coldly. "Both you and I know perfectly well what I owe you. But, if you will let me, I am willing to remember only that you are my betrothed lover's sister."

"Oh, you are engaged, then?"

"Yes."

"Since when—may I ask?"

"Since Harold's last visit here, the day after my arrival."

Fanny's eyes snapped.

"I'd bet now," said she, "that he told mother of it at once, while I have been kept in the dark from the first!"

Marion made no reply, but as Fanny went on with her imaginary grievance, she merely said:

"But perhaps you are no longer thought worthy of their confidence," after which the subject was dropped with a summariness proverbial of the hot potato.

"I have treated you awfully, Marion, and that's the truth!" said Fanny, after a pause.

"But what more can I do than say I am sorry for it?"

"Nothing more; so drop it, please."

"Thank you. But alas! what is to become of me? Come here, Snipsey!"

And the child chancing to be near, she snatched him into her arms with a passionate, though angry tenderness that caused Marion to forgive much more in her character than had been expressed.

"What ought I to do? Can't you advise me a little, Miss Moreton?"

"Any right-minded person can see what you ought to do," said Marion.

"What is it, please?"

"To be honest. Nothing but misery can come of the deceitful double-part you are acting."

"To be honest?" echoed Fanny.

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"By acknowledging your child, taking him home with you, and repudiating your worthless husband publicly."

"Oh! you don't know what I would sacrifice in doing that."

"Perhaps I can imagine it. But would you sacrifice more than your self-respect, which you are now doing?"

"Ah! but the world's opinion—Major More-

ton's admiration! Stop, Snipsey! Well, run along with you, then."

And the child, once more breaking away, ran off to the water's edge.

"Ah, Miss Moreton, you advise too much."

"If you esteem the loss of self-respect preferable to anything, perhaps I do," said Marion, coldly. "But the exposure of your secret can only be a question of time."

Fanny's terror returned.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed. "You, Miss Moreton—surely you will not expose me?"

"Under no consideration—save in self-defense; and I presume that you will not conspire against me again."

"Oh, no, no, no! never again, Miss Moreton! I am really remorseful."

She did not altogether look it, but Marion gave her the benefit of the doubt.

"I am sure your secret will also be safe with your brother," she went on. "But still, discovery is imminent."

"By whom?"

"By your husband."

"By Albert—that wretch? And he half-believes the child dead, too."

"I cannot think so," said Marion. "At all events, he was lurking about here but a short time ago."

"Who—Albert Guernsey?"

"Yes."

"When, where, how? Oh, Miss Moreton, do be frank with me, I beseech! If that wretch should discover Snipsey's whereabouts, I am lost. He would have me under his cruel thumb from that moment forth. Do tell me everything!"

Marion then told her of the cat-rigged boat, and the alarm that its appearance had occasioned her.

Fanny drew a long breath of relief.

"But the man with the opera-glass was not Albert," she exclaimed. "It was your enemy, not mine."

"True," and Marion could not abstain from a shudder. "It was Mr. Bernard."

"Then it must be you that they were looking for. Snipsey could have had nothing to do with their presence in this vicinity."

"However, they did not see me; I am certain of that. Then the coincidence of Snipsey being here with me is to be considered."

"That is true. Oh, if I thought—"

Here there was a screech from Snipsey, and they saw him struggling in the grasp of Albert Guernsey.

The latter had landed on the further side of one of the wharves, and slipped through the lumber piles just in time to snatch up the youngster from amid his pastimes.

For the instant, Fanny's motherly instincts rose superior to motives of selfish prudence.

"That wretch! that villain!" she cried, rushing to the urchin's rescue. "My secret is out, but he shall not profit by it."

With a noble self-sacrifice as to her own safety, Marion followed her.

"There is something good in you yet, Fanny," she exclaimed. "Save the child from such a father at all hazards!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" roared Albert derisively, tucking the squawking and kicking boy under one arm while warding off Fanny's attack with the other. "So, my dear! our charming offspring was dead and buried, and this place was his cemetery, eh? Oh, you double-dyed, petticoated fraud! but I'll be even with you for this piece of deception. Your brother's purse shall sweat before I've done with you, and, as for your dear major, your swell admirer—"

Here for the first time he caught sight of Marion.

"The deuce!" he cried, with a gratified stare. "Here, take the brat, Fanny. Since I have your secret, that is enough at present. Here is prettier prey, by my faith!"

With that he relinquished his hold on Snipsey and transferred it to Marion, while calling out at the top of his voice:

"Here you are, Mr. Bernard! I've got the escaped bird! Hurry up with your gang!"

Strong as she was, Marion was almost as helpless as Snipsey had been in Albert's ruffianly grasp.

"Coward!" she panted, struggling fruitlessly.

"Unhand me, or it shall be the worse for you!"

"Not much, my beauty! There's money in your capture, and even your likeness to your dead mother doesn't scare me now."

And with a brutal laugh at her ineffectual struggles, he again called to his companions, who could be heard clattering in the cat-rigger on the other side of the lumber-piled pier.

Then she appealed to Fanny, who, having got possession of Snipsey, was calculatingly surveying the changed situation, while apparently meditating upon the next best step in her own interest.

The sight of her selfish equanimity maddened Marion into renewing her struggles with her captor.

"Help me, Fanny!" she gasped. "I stood by you; help me, I say!"

"No, no, Marion!" was the collected reply. "To tell the truth, I've never liked you, and it's every one for oneself nowadays."

But Snipsey, though a chip of the same block, physically, was far less of an ingrate.

"Keep on fightin', Miss Mo'ton!" he squeaked. "I'll help you, and so I tell you!"

Suiting the action to the word, he wriggled out of his mother's embrace, and, darting to Marion's assistance, fastened, tooth and nail, upon one of her captor's legs.

It was a good deal like the crab at the heel of Hercules, but, nevertheless, inasmuch as Marion at the same moment redoubled her struggles, Albert was greatly discommoded, and there was a good chance of his captive slipping from his grasp.

"Curse the brat! he's chewing my leg up," growled the scoundrel, still hanging on to the struggling young lady. "Fanny, help me out—tear off the imp, and help me overcome the young lady! Do so, and I'll remember it in your favor—I'll rid you of my persecutions forever. I swear it!"

Fanny did not hesitate to recapture Snipsey on the instant, after which she roughly seized one of Marion's wrists, and thus materially assisted in her subjugation.

"All right," said she. "But don't forget what you have sworn to, Albert Guernsey. I'll hold you to your oath!"

If a glance could blast, Marion's would have withered and survived her up at that moment.

Subdued and helpless, she could only glare at her in mingled scorn, indignation and contempt.

Even the fact of Mr. Bernard—followed by old Guernsey and several other rough-looking men—running across the dock at that moment and seizing her with a triumphant exclamation could not instantly distract her from her reprobation of Fanny's ingratitude and treachery.

"Infamous woman!" she exclaimed, with billowing breast and flashing eyes; "you are out of the pale of reproaches. Loathing is all you deserve. How I pity my poor Harold in the possession of such a sister!"

"Thank you," said Fanny, with an indifferent toss of the head. "Curses, howsoever deserved, may come home to roost, remember."

And, with a shrug of her shoulders, she started to drag Snipsey away in the direction of the house.

But a retribution was in readiness for her. She was suddenly confronted by an elegant-looking gentleman, from whom she recoiled in confusion and terror.

"Major Moreton—Herbert!" was all she could ejaculate.

CHAPTER XI.

JERRY TO THE RESCUE.

It was indeed Fanny's elegant admirer, Major Herbert St. George Moreton, who had at that moment stepped upon the dock from the neighboring street, in which he had apparently been taking a listless stroll, though the locality was an odd promenading-ground for one of his aristocratic pretensions.

He raised his eyebrows, adjusted his gold-rimmed eye-glass, and surveyed with astonishment, first the confused young woman, then the screaming, kicking urchin in her grasp, and then the strange tableau of Marion in the clutches of Mr. Bernard, though between the latter and himself there suddenly passed a surprised look of recognition that was not lost upon either of the young women.

Then he raised his hat to Fanny and made her his best bow, which was perfection in its way.

"Let me help you with the little fellow," said he, taking Snipsey's disengaged hand with persuasive firmness. "Who is our little friend, Miss Harcourt? One of your small *protégés* among the suffering poor of the great city, eh?"

Fanny tremblingly murmured an assent, and was moving off with him toward the house, when the brief fabric of her hope was shattered as soon as conceived.

"I ain't her Portugee, and so I tell you!" squalled the *enfant terrible*, with renewed uproariousness. "She's my mammy, and there's my pappy over there, what used to lick her and me, too, before I was a big boy. They're bad 'uns, too, both on 'em! Lemme go back to Miss Mo'ton! I won't be tarried away from Miss Mo'ton!"

Fanny's face flamed crimson, and Albert Guernsey burst into a coarse laugh.

"Own up, old girl!" bawled the latter. "Your swell mash tumbles to your little game at last, and you can't rub out our marriage-certificate, though you were but a school-girl when it took ink, and I've been a jail-bird since. Own up, my beauty! Ha, ha, ha!"

The major leaned forward earnestly, though she could scarcely see him for her humiliating tears.

"Heavens, how I commiserate you!" said he, in a low voice. "But bear up, and all may yet be well. Come; let me see you out of this."

And he led her swiftly away across the garden, Snipsey being still in tow.

The westering sun had disappeared in a bank of clouds, and the evening shadows were hurrying on.

Marion, who had remained like a statue while this strange little episode was taking place,

now, seeing herself left alone with Mr. Bernard and his ruffianly followers, suddenly broke away from her guardian's detaining grasp, and made a run for it along the edge of the lumber-dock.

But Mr. Bernard recaptured her with an agility that was surprising, considering his portliness.

"Not so, my child!" he exclaimed, angrily. "Think you I have sought for you thus long and anxiously but to lose you again? Not if I know it!"

"Unhand me, Mr. Bernard!" cried Marion, renewing her struggles. "You have no right or authority over me!"

"Have I not? The law gives me the right, as your real guardian, you well know! Cease this absurd opposition to my will, or it will be the worse for you. Ha!"

She set her teeth hard, and continued to fight for her liberty.

"Girl, are you mad? Would you make another disgraceful scene? Here, Guernsey—Albert—lend a hand! Marion, have done! This is disgraceful!"

"Of course it is—your shameful, unmanly conduct!" panted the young girl, ceasing not to struggle, for all the odds against her, for now the two Guernseys and the half-dozen other ruffians were dancing around the contending pair, each apparently eager to be of service in subjugating her. "You coward! you criminal coward! Would you destroy the daughter, as you did the mother? Is not Joel Redfield's blood sufficiently heavy on your guilty soul?"

Mr. Bernard turned livid, and he staggered back, though without wholly releasing her.

"You know too much already—even half-knowledge on some subjects is dangerous," he hissed in her ear. "Marion!" his grasp again closed inexorably upon her; "submit. Resistance is useless. These rough men are all the creatures of my power. Give in, I tell you! I mean nothing but for your good."

"Ah, to be sure!" with frantic irony, as she still kept up the unequal struggle. "Your will with me is a truly angelic one, of course! Mr. Bernard, I don't want another public scene any more than you do."

"Why are you bent on making one, then?" "I am not; it is you. Release me, I say, or I shall scream for help!"

"Ah, shall you? There! Guernsey, grab that right wrist, and then into the boat with her! So, you demur at the gag, do you? Hurry up, you fellows, and guard the entrance to the dock yonder. There; now we're getting along."

But Marion had uttered a half-stifled scream before Mr. Bernard's fat hand had closed indubitably over her mouth, and it had reached the ear of one champion who, though single-handed, was a whole team in himself.

Before she could be dragged out of sight across the dock by Mr. Bernard and the two Guernseys, while the other ruffians were deploying along the water's edge, Jerry Cleaver was seen rushing across the old garden to the rescue.

His paper cap was still on his head, and his artisan's striped apron was around him still. He brandished no weapons but his redoubtable fists. Not a shout, not even a growl, signalized his rush, which was like that of the bravest beast on earth, the bull-dog—silent, deadly, arrow-like to the common enemy's throat.

Marion saw him coming, and managed to emit another muffled cry as she renewed her struggles with fresh heart.

Her immediate captors, however, were undismayed, as they continued to drag her, step by step, through the lumber piles, toward the further side of the dock.

"Quick!" growled Mr. Bernard, making a slight pause to wipe the perspiration from his streaming brow. "It is but one man, and what is he against so many of us?"

But that one man was the pugilistic victor over 'Longshoreman Jake, besides one of the conquerors of Sam and Enoch Cutway, the Spuyten Duyvil Wonders.

Even at that instant two of the rear-guard went down as if shot under the lightning blows of his sledge-hammer fists, a third was tossed over the string-piece with surprising summariness, while the three remaining rascals seemed more desirous of getting out of his reach than of assuming the offensive, as his shoulder-hitting blows sought them out with unerring rapidity and vim.

Mr. Bernard, who was now puffing and blowing like a porpoise by reason of his plethora and unusual exertions, plumped himself down on a small pile of boards, while still retaining Marion and stifling her attempted cries in his powerful grasp.

"Bless me!" he gasped, "what manner of man is that fellow yonder, anyway? Can it be Kilrain in a paper cap, or the champion, John L. Sullivan, on a Harlem jamboree? Something must be done, or he'll slaughter us all, or, at all events, ruin everything."

"I'll take a hand in this, I reckon!" growled the elder Guernsey.

He snatched up an improvised bludgeon and glided toward the scene of contention in a crouching attitude, like an old panther.

"There can't be too many spoons in such a kettle of broth," commented ex-Convict Albert, with a significant smile. "Here goes, anyway!"

He took up a huge boulder that chanced to be lying at his feet, and slipped after his precious parent.

"No firearms!" called out Mr. Bernard, warningly, after them. "Remember that! No shooting!"

Compulsorily mute, Marion perceived it all with mingled rage, horror and indignation.

"Oh, the cowards! the base, crawling cowards!" she said to herself, while following the fortunes of the unequal fight with straining eyes, though no longer able to raise a finger, she was so outworn, and with her guardian's hand still pressed crushingly over her lips. "Eight against one, and yet two of those arm themselves before venturing into the fray!"

She did not exaggerate the inequality of the struggle, for by this time, just as the Guernseys joined the trio who were so hard-pressed by Jerry's pugilistic prowess, the two men whom he had already overthrown regained their feet to take a fresh hand in the scrimmage, while the chap who had been treated to a ducking was crawling up over the string-piece, revenge in his eye and a brickbat in his right hand.

"Aha!" soliloquized Mr. Bernard, chucklingly; "now they've got him. The intermeddling fool must, indeed, be of wrought-iron if he goes not down before these merry myrmidons of mine!"

In spite of her helplessness, Marion's blood was boiling in her veins.

She would gladly have vailed away the cruel and dastardly spectacle, and was yet impelled to look, as by a species of fascination.

She had a vague consciousness of seeing the valiant Jerry disappear beneath a mound of struggling, twisting forms, like a beset hunter or woodman, ax in hand, who at last goes down under a mob of mountain-wolves.

Then everything swam before her eyes, a dull, despairing feeling possessed her, and she was dimly sensible of being dragged, hustled and hurried across the long dock, amid the towering lumber-piles and the swift-trooping shadows of the twilight.

An unreal vision was before her of a sail-boat rocking recklessly under the string-piece, of her guardian and his entire ruffianly crew clustering tumultuously around her, of their trying to force her into the boat, and of her still resisting frantically and with all her strength.

"In with her!" she heard Mr. Bernard say, with an oath. "Curse it all! the police will be upon us, if we are not off in a jiffy. Guernsey, where is the chloroform?"

All this as in a dream. Then her final, desperate resistance, as there was an attempt to press a damp handkerchief over her mouth and nostrils.

Then panic, confusion, dismay—trampling feet and fierce voices.

Flashes of recognition before her eyes! Then, was that Harold's, her own Harold's beloved voice, signaling a rescue to her gratified ears?

Yes, it was none other. The nightmare of her waking dream was displaced by renewed hope and vigilance. There was another fight at the overhanging water's edge—between the lumber-piles and the rocking boat—and she was somehow in or near the heart of it.

Yes; and who were these heroes rushing to her rescue, dealing powerful, effective blows, right and left, so that many men's strength seemed concentrating in each single arm?

Jerry Cleaver, covered with blood, but still active, formidable, indomitable; Tom, his stalwart brother, no less inspired by the fierce fire of contention against great odds; and lastly Harold himself, stick in hand, lips compressed, eyes emitting gloomy sparks from under his knitted brows!

Yes; it was no dream. The dastard odds in favor of the foe seemed to melt and disappear before the valor and leonine vigor of that triple attack.

And was not that shadowy figure, crouched with clasped hands just out of the turmoil of the fray, good Mrs. Forsyth herself?

True. Marion had a vague sensation of tottering toward her, of being clasped in those faithful and loving arms.

Then, amid continued shouts, curses, the sound of crushing blows, splashes in the water, and the creaking of a sail and rigging, a second dimness and unreality came over her, and she knew no more.

When she again became conscious of her environments, she was in the parlor of Mrs. Cleaver's little cottage.

She was resting in that good dame's embrace, Mrs. Forsyth was bathing her temples with *eau de cologne*, and her lover, brave Harold, dear Harold, opportune Harold, was bending anxiously over her.

CHAPTER XII.

GONE!

"Where am I?" murmured Marion, trying to raise herself up. "Ah, now I remember."

How did it all happen? Harold, dear Harold! And the brave Jerry—he was not killed, then? Tell me everything. But, God be praised! I am with you still—I am saved—Mr. Bernard did not succeed in carrying me away!”

“Hush! you mustn’t talk yet,” said Mrs. Forsyth, gently. “You have undergone a great shock, you are still unstrung.”

“Yes; rest quietly at present, my darling!” said Harold, taking her hands fondly in his. “All is well again—you are saved to us. Let that content you, dear.”

But it did not content her, and she insisted on rising.

“Unstrung, indeed!” said she, a little pettishly. “Why should I remain unstrung, when I am safe, when I am still with you all—when Mr. Bernard has again failed in his vulture swoop upon me?” She shuddered at the recollection, but almost instantly was herself again. “I am not a child, but a young woman. Tell me everything, I say! Jerry—poor, brave, heroic Jerry!—do not tell me that he was killed! Ah! that last time, he was covered with blood—I saw him!”

She passed her hand over her face, and shuddered afresh.

Mrs. Cleaver burst into a laugh.

“Jerry is all right, Miss Moreton,” said she. “He is a born fighter, as is Tom also, and a few bruises and scratches, more or less, are nothing to him.”

“Jerry is not seriously hurt,” interposed Harold. “They left him for dead, but he revived just as Tom and I rushed to the rescue.”

“Ah! and then?”

“Then we burst upon the gang like a cyclone just as they were trying to force you into the boat. In five minutes there was nothing left of them.”

“Weren’t there some policemen there?”

“Yes, after it was all over. They could only set up a search for the flying scoundrels, and even in that they were unsuccessful. Not a capture was made, I regret to say.”

“It was shameful!” said Mrs. Forsyth. “I should like to know what the police are good for, anyway. Boat and men disappeared in the dusk, as if by magic.”

“But those others, who were they?” demanded Marion. “I mean the rough men who were assisting my guardian and the two Guernseys.”

Mrs. Cleaver took upon herself to reply to this query.

“Villains—discharged scab workmen hereabouts—cowardly ruffians, up to any crime at the demand of the highest bidder!” she exclaimed, resentfully. “But Tom and Jerry know them all. They’ll get their deserts. No fear of that.”

“But, you, Harold, how did you and Mrs. Forsyth chance to be on hand so opportunely?”

“It was by the purest accident, or rather by the happiest coincidence,” said Harold. “Mrs. Forsyth had some fresh copying to bring you, and we made up our minds to give you a little surprise by taking tea with you. As it was, we chanced to arrive in the nick of time.”

“Now it is your turn, Marion,” said Mrs. Forsyth. “You must tell us of your adventure from the very first—that is, if you have sufficiently recovered from the shock.”

“Oh, I am as good as ever now,” said Marion, with a forced laugh, though she still betrayed nervous excitement. “I can tell you the story in a few words.”

She began to do so, but without mentioning the preliminary of honest Jerry’s attempt at love-making, and but scant allusion to Fanny’s arrival and subsequent participation in the earlier stage of the adventure.

But before she had finished she chanced to catch a glimpse of herself in a long, narrow mirror on the opposite wall, when she for the first time became aware of her disheveled and untidy appearance, which was but little better than as she had freshly emerged from the affray at the edge of the lumber-dock.

“Oh, what a fright I am!” she cried, greatly mortified. “Why didn’t some one of you tell me of it? It wasn’t fair!”

She ran up-stairs to her room, laughing strangely, blushing and shaking her head.

Mrs. Forsyth followed her, looking somewhat anxious.

“Don’t be long,” called out Mrs. Cleaver after them. “Supper is just ready to go on the table.”

On this occasion supper was set separately for Marion and her guests in the parlor, the good dame Cleaver and her sons not being seen during the repast.

When Marion, accompanied by the forewoman, came down to it a few minutes later, it was in a calmer mood, and without any traces of her recent adventure.

Still, there was a painful restlessness occasionally observable in her manner, and Mrs. Forsyth continued to watch her narrowly.

“Where’s Snipsey?” asked Marion, as they drew up to table. “But I suppose Mrs. Cleaver has him with her.”

“No, he is not with her, Marion,” said Harold, with masculine obtuseness as to the continued shakiness of the young girl’s nerves. “You might as well know how much we know, first as

last. Fanny has carried Snipsey off.” And he accepted the cup of tea she had just poured out for him.

Mrs. Forsyth gave him a warning glance, but the mischief was done. Marion’s painful excitement had repossessed her and she was all a-tremble.

“Carried off, you say?” she exclaimed. “Poor little Snipsey! But what do you know, anyway?”

Mrs. Forsyth now thought it best to be frank, too, but she resolved that it should be in her woman’s way, and not in Harold’s.

“Be calm and I will tell you dear,” said she, soothingly. “As Mr. Harcourt first approached the cottage, before the spectacle of Tom Cleaver rushing from the boat-shop to his brother’s assistance apprised us that something unusual was in the wind, we met Miss Harcourt and Major Moreton hurrying out of the garden with the little boy between them.”

“An, you saw that?”

“Yes; and it was evident from the few words we overheard them exchange (though we were unperceived by them) that Miss Harcourt must have been in some way mixed up with this second attempt to abduct you.”

Marion was greatly disturbed. In spite of Fanny’s abominable ingratitude, she would willingly have saved her from further exposure still, though perhaps purely for Harold’s sake.

“Tell us about it,” said Mrs. Forsyth, reassuringly.

Marion bowed her head in silence, while clasping and twisting her pretty hands in a poor, helpless way.

“Do not spare me, if that is what embarrasses you, Marion,” said Harold, in a tone of suppressed anguish. “Though to my shame I confess it, I am ready to believe my sister capable of anything mean, heartless and contemptible.”

Marion made a deprecating gesture, but he went on:

“Oh, but I know! Her treachery was apparent in the first attempt against you; what more likely than that it should have instigated this last one? Then the secret of her marriage and motherhood was divulged to me, though but vaguely, the moment I set eyes on the child. So whatever you may say can violate no confidence on that score.”

“But she was not cognizant of this last attempt against me,” said Marion, eagerly. “At least, she did not instigate it. Indeed, she did not!”

“An amazing piece of virtue and forbearance on her part!” commented Harold, coldly.

“Harold, it is just as I tell you.”

“Still, she was fresh from some sort of an interview with you—I am sure of that much from what I overheard her say to her companion—and you at the same moment engaged in a life-and-liberty struggle with those cowardly hounds!”

Marion again bent her head without speaking.

“You would try to shield her again, and at your own expense,” said Harold, bitterly. “Your nobleness is touching, but is she worth such magnanimity?”

Marion burst into tears.

“I am afraid she is not,” she sobbed. “But she is your sister, Harold.”

Greatly moved, the young man took her hand.

“I must insist that you spare her no longer on any account,” said he, with gentle firmness. “Tell me everything, just as soon as you can compose yourself.”

“Mr. Harcourt is right, Marion,” said Mrs. Forsyth. “It is an obligation that you owe to yourself.”

“Not only that,” continued Harold, “but how can I protect you intelligently against your enemies, without being fully alive to the extent of the treacheries operating against you?”

Thus urged, Marion finally told the whole story of her interview with Fanny, and what followed it.

This she did but haltingly, and not without being prompted by much cross-examination, but it all came out at last.

Especially were her hearers moved by the revelation of Fanny’s base ingratitude.

“It is unheard-of—unparalleled!” exclaimed Harold, in an access of vainly-restrained indignation. “She is no longer a sister of mine! She is a libel on the name of womanhood!”

“I knew you would say that,” said Marion, weeping afresh. “It is wicked to have such feelings of one’s sister!”

“And abominable to have such a sister! I have done with her forever!”

Mrs. Forsyth made no other comment than to take Marion’s hands in hers, and regard her with a world of pity and admiration through her great spectacles.

“Hush! do not cry any more,” said she, soothingly. “They have not torn you from us yet, dear—you are still with us, thank Heaven!”

“Ah, but how long will it be so?” murmured the young girl, despairingly. “I can never feel safe again; they will yet succeed in carrying me away.”

“By Heaven! but they shall not,” exclaimed

Harold, with a resumption of his confident, business-like tone. “Not so long as I have strength, courage and acuteness to circumvent them! And, should they succeed in doing so, I will constitute myself a sleuth-hound, an inexorable detective, till I have run them to earth and rescued you! But, as a first step of safety, you must find another retreat without an hour’s delay. You must quit this place at once.”

“That is best,” said Mrs. Forsyth. “It is indispensable.”

Marion eagerly caught at this idea.

“You think so?” she exclaimed, looking up excitedly. “I can get ready in a few minutes. But have you another retreat in mind for me?”

“Yes, yes; or we’ll soon find one,” said Harold, energetically. “Pack up, and we’ll be off with you instantaneously.”

Marion sprung to her feet.

“I can pack my things in less than ten minutes,” said she, with fresh hopefulness in her voice and manner, as she quitted the table. “I will call to you when I am ready.”

Mrs. Forsyth would have accompanied her, but was prevented by a gesture from the young woman as she disappeared.

They heard her run up-stairs, and then moving briskly about in her room, which was directly overhead.

“Where shall we take her to?” asked Mrs. Forsyth, also rising.

“We can determine upon that *en route*,” said Harold, bestirring himself. “Our first care is to get her away from this place, and with as much secrecy as possible.”

Mrs. Cleaver was summoned forthwith, and informed of the step that had been decided upon.

She acquiesced in its necessity, much as she regretted to lose Marion’s society.

Then, at Harold’s suggestion, she sent her son Tom to procure a hackney coach, which was soon forthcoming, and they impatiently awaited Marion’s promised signal.

But the allotted ten minutes, and even twice ten minutes, slipped away, without its being received.

Then it suddenly struck them that the movements overhead had been discontinued for some little time, and both Mrs. Cleaver and Mrs. Forsyth ran up-stairs to ascertain the cause of delay.

Then a scream from one of them brought Harold to the foot of the stairs with a rush.

“What is it?” he called up.

It was Mrs. Forsyth’s voice that answered him.

“She is gone!” it wailed. “They have carried her off! Marion has disappeared, bag and baggage!”

CHAPTER XIII.

A MAD RACE.

HAROLD was up the stairs and in Marion’s deserted chamber almost at a bound.

A single glance around the interior explained the extraordinary nature of the “mysterious disappearance.”

A large side-window was still open, by which entrance had doubtless been afforded to the stealthy and persistent abductors.

The young girl had probably just completed the packing of her trunk when she had been seized from behind, gagged before a warning could spring from her lips, and spirited away into the unknown—incontinently, “bag and baggage,” just as the excited old forewoman had surmised.

A ladder, leading up to the window-ledge from the outside, and afterward recognized as having been surreptitiously taken from a neighboring shed, was sufficient confirmation of the manner and execution of the bold and infernal plot.

Harold was for the moment as dazed as the speechless and terrified women themselves.

He staggered back, smiting his forehead with his clinched hand.

Then he was once more the man of action and resource.

“The water!” he exclaimed, hoarsely: “the river! ’Tis thus they have come and gone. A coach could not have approached the house without our knowing it. Call Tom and Jerry!”

With that he dashed out of the room and out of the house in the direction of the water-front.

Mrs. Cleaver’s stalwart sons joined him there a moment later.

Without a word, they drew in a long slender row-boat—one of the prime specimens of their handiwork, and always kept in readiness at her stake—an’ tossed two pairs of sculls aboard.

As they did so, there came the sound of oars in rowlocks—a lessening sound—from far out over the dark and sullen waters.

For it was a night of out few stars, with the crescent moon just trembling on the rise—not yet high enough to afford more than a glimmering and uncertain light.

“’Tis the villains!” growled Jerry. “They’re making for one of the railroad stations. We can row ’em down!”

Followed by Harold, the brothers tumbled into the boat.

The spoon-bladed sculls bit the water with a trained, simultaneous stroke, and the sharp boat cut out in chase with arrowy speed.

At the same instant a faint cry—a woman's cry—mingled with the sound of the fugitive oars, was borne to their ears on the wind.

Harold was at the stern, the tiller lines in hand.

"Marion's voice!" he muttered. "I'd swear to it among a thousand!" And he gritted his teeth.

But the Cleaver brothers were now getting in their champion stroke, and the boat was fairly on the jump.

Jerry, who directly faced Harold, looked somewhat ghastly in the dim light, by reason of the still bloody bandages about his damaged head and face, but he nodded grimly in response as his massive figure rocked back and forth in unison with his powerful, sweeping strokes.

"Right you are, young feller!" said he. "But have no fear. There's no boat on the river can lay over the Plover on a straight-way course with Tom and me at the sculls."

Presently the moon came up, broad and bright, plainly showing the fugitive craft somewhat over half a mile ahead.

It was a long, sharp row-boat, containing a number of persons, and with three pairs of oars hard at work.

But it at once became evident to Harold that its oarsmen were less skillful than the Cleavers, and he took heart.

He also thought he distinguished Marion's form crouched at the stern between two burlier figures, and he ground his teeth.

"Oh, we'll overhaul the duffers, Mr. Harcourt!" called out Tom, with no less confidence than his brother. "They're no good."

"I only hope so!" muttered Harold.

"But we're bound to do it!"

"Why?"

"Why, because we can out-row 'em, hand over hand, for one thing."

"And, for another," struck in Jerry, "there's lots of rocks and eddies up yonder by Randall's Island that they know mighty little about. But what is that queer smell? You're not smoking, sir?"

"Can't you see that I'm not?" And Harold also sniffed at the odd smell, which was now sufficiently apparent from somewhere along the bottom of the boat.

"Smells like powder now," continued Jerry. "What can it be?"

Tom burst into a short laugh.

"It's them street boys!" said he. "I heard some of 'em touching off fire-crackers in our back yard awhile ago, an' I reckon they tossed a stub or two into the Plover by way of a joke."

This was accepted as the explanation, and the powder-smell was no longer thought of, while the Plover continued to gain steadily on the larger boat.

At last considerable confusion was seen to reign on board the latter, now less than quarter of a mile away.

Her oarsmen seemed to strike the water aimlessly, while she began to spin around in the broad moonlighted stretch off the head of the island, as if seized and twisted by an invisible hand at her keel.

"Hurrah!" cried Jerry, with a cheerful glance back over his shoulder. "The tide's ag'in 'em, an' they've struck the big swirl between the black rocks where the sea-bass are so plenty."

"Sure as a gun!" said Tom, also glancing forward. "We'll have 'em dead! Study the water, sir, an' be keeful of your steerin'."

Harold was duly mindful, and at that instant a hopeful cry rung out from the graceful figure in the stern of the now almost overtaken boat.

No more any doubt as to her identity, for it was Marion's voice.

"Is it you, Harold?" she called.

"Yes," was his deep-voiced response. "Be of good heart."

"Oh, I am so now," she called again. "But beware! these villains are well armed."

She had partly risen, but was rudely dragged down by the burlier of her companions, whom Harold now distinctly recognized as Mr. Bernard.

At the same instant there was a pistol-shot from another and slenderer man—doubtless Albert Guernsey—and a bullet whistled uncomfortably close over the pursuer's heads.

Marion uttered a little scream.

"Don't fear for us!" Harold sung out, collectedly. "We're willing to have the police take a hand in this, if your captors are."

"Good enough!" growled Tom Cleaver, approvingly. "That'll silence their barking. But drat that powder-smell! Where can it come from? Seems to be somewhere in the bow here, just back of me."

But he was too busy with his oars to make an examination, as was also Jerry, for Harold was steering with commendable discretion, and twenty more strokes would carry them alongside the embarrassed fugitive.

Jerry alone had grown silent and sad, though bending to his oar with undiminished energy.

He had come to love and adore Marion with all the strength and passion of his honest heart, which was therefore but painfully in the work

that was designed to return her to a rival's arms.

Tom was right as to the effect of Harold's warning upon the fugitives.

No other shot was fired, and Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey could both be heard harshly reproving Albert for his ill-advised demonstration.

In the mean time the fugitive boat had at last succeeded in drawing out of the dangerous and unexpected whirlpool between the black rocks, but the Plover was now almost overlapping it, and Harold, after a silent signal to Tom and Jerry, suddenly dropped the tiller-lines, drew his own revolver and leveled it.

"We rather court police interference than otherwise!" he sung out. "Drop those sculls, you chaps, or I'll pick you off, one by one, like so many chickens!"

The three men, thus threatened, stopped rowing in considerable confusion, one of them even dropping his oars, and another "catching a crab" that sent him sprawling on the flat of his back.

Mr. Bernard thunderingly denounced them as cravens, and roughly caught Marion in his arms as she was once more starting up with a glad and hopeful cry.

"You infernal cowards!" he roared, with an oath. "What are you afraid of? Don't you know that they are doomed? Ha! Good-by, gentlemen; a happy journey to you for the next world—provided there is any!"

The last remark was sardonically addressed to the pursuers, in the bow of whose boat there was simultaneously a puff of powder-smoke.

Then there was a flash, an explosion, a shriek from Marion, and the Plover was blown to pieces.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HURRICANE DETECTIVE'S VOW.

A FIENDISH yell rose from the abductors' boat as the erst pursuing craft disappeared in the moonlight amid a shower of smashed timbers, flying spray and brief cloud of sulphurous smoke, while Marion sunk down in a dead faint.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Bernard. "A brave ending for intermeddling idiots and fools! Not a hair or hide of 'em in sight! Pull away, my hearties! Ten dollars extra for you if you land us at the railroad-station in less than half an hour!"

The Guernseys, father and son, responded with a diabolical chuckle, while Mr. Bernard contentedly resumed his seat, where he took the form of the unconscious girl in his arms and proceeded to restore her to sensibility.

At the same instant the oarsmen once more fell to with a will, and the scene of the tragedy was soon left far behind.

But it was not wholly a tragedy that had been effected, and by one at least of the intended victims were those last words of exultation heard ere they were borne away in the distance.

It was by Harold Harcourt, who, having been hurled into the water just beyond the larger of the two half-submerged rocks, between which such a dangerous eddy foamed and swirled, now crawled partly out upon it, drenched, somewhat stunned, and with strange lights still dancing before his eyes, but otherwise little the worse for the catastrophe.

Strangely enough, the revolver, which he had been in the act of leveling at the moment of the explosion, was still retained in the grasp of his right hand.

He managed to climb yet higher upon the rock, and then, returning the weapon to his pocket, shook his clinched hand after the disappearing boat.

"Monsters of treachery and inhumanity!" he exclaimed, in an access of exasperated fury. "Though baffled now, I will yet bound you down—I will yet rescue my dear love from your diabolical conspiracy! Ay, though I abandon aught else and become from this time forth a sleuth-hound pursuer, a Hurricane Detective, on your crime-soaked trail!"

He raised his hand solemnly aloft, as if calling upon Heaven to register his vow, but was almost instantly concerned as to the fate of his sturdy companions, who he doubted not had been killed by the explosion and were most likely already in watery graves.

"Oh, they must be dead!" he exclaimed, his rage giving way to anguish. "The brave, the fearless brothers! Even if rescued from this wave-washed rock, how can I carry the miserable story of their fate to their widowed mother?"

But at this moment a powerful grasp was laid on his leg, which was still partly submerged, and he turned with a delighted cry as Jerry's well-remembered voice came to his ear.

"That he blown!" said Jerry also pulling himself out on the rock, and shaking himself like a drenched Newfoundland dog. "Here's one of 'em that the little widowed mother won't whimper over yet awhile, I reckon!"

"This is glorious!" cried Harold, joyfully.

"God be praised, you are alive!"

"It looks something like it, eh?" and Jerry

shook himself again. "Where's Tom, I wonder?"

Before Harold could answer there was a lusty hail, and Tom Cleaver was then perceived to be clinging to the neighboring and smaller rock, upon which he had just fastened his iron grip, after shaking the sea-water out of his face and eyes.

"Hullo!" shouted the latter. "But wait for me, will you?—that is, if you ain't in too big a hurry."

He thereupon slid again into the water, and a few powerful strokes brought him likewise to a perch upon the larger rock, which by this time had but little of its scant surface unoccupied.

Great was the rejoicing of the trio at finding themselves once again united, safe and sound, though under such discouraging circumstances.

"The scoundrels!" exclaimed Tom. "They had planted a torpedo in the forward locker of the Plover, as a last precaution, just before pushing off with their captive."

"That explains it," said Jerry. "If we had only taken time for an examination when first we smelled the fuse burning! However, it's no use squealing over spilled milk."

"That's so; and better luck next time," said Tom. "The loss of the Plover is tough on us, Jerry, but we'll get even with the rascals some time."

"Yes," assented Jerry, regretfully. "A better boat never came out of our shop, or danced to the rhythm of a well-timed stroke over the bosom of the Harlem or East River. However, we may think ourselves fortunate as it is."

Harold looked around on the broad, moonlighted expanse from the rocky spur that afforded them such a meager resting-place.

"In what way?" he asked.

"The deuce!" said Jerry. "In not being blown to pieces ourselves, no less than the boat."

"Ah! a fault of the conspirators there," said Tom. "The bomb was so placed that the bow of the boat was blown out, letting us down into the water before the continuation of the explosion knocked the rest of the boat into smithereens. However, we can't remain here all night. Wait a bit."

With that he again plunged into the water, and headed away with lusty buffets for the Randall's Island shore, which was the one least distant.

"Where is he going?" asked Harold.

"To borrow a boat of one of the keepers yonder, with whom we are well acquainted," said Jerry. "In half an hour we ought to be drying ourselves out in my mother's kitchen. After that—"

He paused abruptly, maintaining a sullen sort of silence, while looking at Harold significantly.

Harold looked at him in turn.

Jerry's bandages and bruises had both in a great measure disappeared through the invigorating though unsolicited salt-water duck he had undergone, or at least so it seemed in the moonlight, and he was looking pale and sad, with a thoughtful air that lent a sort of dignity to his comely features and herculean proportions.

"You are a splendid fellow, Jerry," said Harold, after a pause. "Somehow I feel toward you like a brother. What were you about to say?"

Something like a sigh issued from the young boat-builder's lips, which were then compressed tightly.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Harcourt," said he. "Just as I was crawling up here to keep you company on this rock, and before you were aware of my being within hearing, didn't you—that is, weren't you making some sort of a vow, with regard to—to the young lady, and them hounds who have carried her off?"

"Yes," said Harold, hesitating.

"Indeed, sir, I couldn't help overhearing of it!"

"Of course, you couldn't. That is nothing, my dear fellow."

"Oh, I'm glad of that!"

"There was nothing in the vow I made to be ashamed of," said Harold, nevertheless flushing.

"Still, I wouldn't like to be considered soft, you know."

"Soft! I'd like to hear any one accuse you of being soft when I'm around, Mr. Harcourt. That isn't what I meant in alluding to it, sir."

"Thank you. Well, what then?"

The boat-builder laid his massive forefinger on the other's sleeve.

"Make that vow over again," he said, impressively. "I'd like to share it with you; that is, if you've no particular objection, mate."

Harold, who could know nothing of the young man's powerful and hopeless passion, was naturally taken by surprise.

"You?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, me! I'd as lief take a vacation now as any time in such a daring cause. And, Mr. Harcourt, am I right in supposing that you would wish to carry this thing through without any publicity or perlice interference?"

"Yes," said Harold, in a low voice. "You are right about that. Miss Moreton is very sensitive to anything like publicity; such would be her wish."

"All right, then. Is it a go? Do you have

any doubt as to my capacity and devotion in such a cause?"

And Jerry stretched up his two brawny arms, which seemed powerful enough to break a bullock's neck at a single wrench.

"By no means," said Harold, smiling. "You would doubtless be of immense service to me on such an errand of danger and adventure. I am only puzzled at your concerning yourself in the affair—at your desiring to share it with me at all."

"Mr. Harcourt, that's my secret. Let it go as such. But will you accept me as your comrade in it all, through thick and thin?"

"Yes, and gladly."

"All right. Now repeat that Hurricane Detective vow of yours, and I'll follow you word for word. You'll find me a tornado companion in this thing, or there isn't a right hair in my head! Repeat it, mister."

Duly impressed by his earnestness, Harold did as he was requested, and the oath was repeated word for word by Jerry, who concluded with a vigorous and deep-voiced Amen!

Directly after taking the vow in this romantic and picturesque manner, Tom Cleaver was perceived putting off in a boat for them.

"I've promised to return this craft to the keeper inside of an hour," said the latter as he drew near. "So no time is to be lost."

Fortunately, the destruction of the Plover had not attracted attention from either shore.

Harry and Jerry scrambled on board the boat, which was at once headed down-stream.

Jerry was more thoughtful and taciturn than his wont.

"He don't know why I join him in this hunt—probably never will," he muttered to himself. "But she may find it out, perhaps after I've died for her!"

CHAPTER XV.

DOGGED AT EVERY STEP.

A WARM wind was blowing, so that the garments of the three men were completely dried by the time they reached the lumber dock at the back of Mrs. Cleaver's garden.

Harold and Jerry stood on the dock for some moments looking after Tom, as in another boat, he at once set about towing the one back that had been borrowed.

"Let us go to the house," said Harold, after a long pause. "Both your mother and Mrs. Forsyth will doubtless be anxious about us."

"Wait yet a minute, Harold—if I may make bold to address you thus in the future," said Jerry.

"There's no boldness to mention. We are both workmen, and consequently brothers and equals."

They were still standing on the outer string-piece, with the great piles of sawed lumber towering high over their heads from behind.

"Good!" exclaimed Jerry. "Comrade, put it there!"

He held out his broad, massive palm, in which Harold's smaller but firmly-knit hand was almost lost out of sight as he placed it there.

"You will set about the search early, I take it?" continued Jerry.

"Yes; say at nine in the morning. It will take me until then to arrange for my business to go on in my absence, without counting the few hours necessary for rest and sleep."

"Where and when shall we meet?"

"At my house, at nine sharp."

Harold passed him his card.

Jerry accepted it with a grateful nod.

"Good!" said he. "Now follow me. I shall be rather risky walking around here at night."

He led the way with a springy step, Harold following him closely.

The path was along the string-pieces, not more than a foot wide, between the somewhat giddy brink and the towering lumber-piles.

They were just rounding the end of the dock when a low mocking laugh, accompanied by the words, "You're slow to drown, you chaps; how will a little smashing down suit you?" was heard from close at hand.

Then there was a heaving, crackling, and a lofty pile of heavy joist and scantling timber was toppled over with a crash upon their devoted heads.

Jerry had just time to seize Harold in his arms, spring overboard, and then huddle with him under the edge of the pier before the ruin came thundering down into the water.

Then, almost before the dust of the *débris* had died away in the moonlight, he had him cut and over upon the pier again, and was racing like a madman in pursuit of a figure that was flying away amid the quaking structures.

Harold rejoined him in the garden after he had returned, a few minutes later, from a fruitless chase.

"Gone! too quick for me!" said Jerry, panting. "But, Harold, this little incident proves one thing."

And he laid a ponderous finger on the other's arm after his usual solemn manner.

Harold smiled at hearing the fresh catastrophe they had just escaped so narrowly thus slightly characterized.

"What is the one thing that it proves, Jerry?" he asked.

"That we're doubtless to be beset at every turn, both here and elsewhere," said Jerry, impressively. "That the head devil of Miss Moreton's captors has left agent imps behind, no less than them he has taken with him."

"That is so, with a vengeance," said Harold. "We cannot henceforth be too much on our guard. Wherever we go there will be danger in the very air we breathe."

They delayed no longer, but entered the cottage.

Here the women were made acquainted with what had occurred, and Harold, while escorting Mrs. Forsyth to her home, seized the opportunity to inform her somewhat of his future plans.

There was a sort of mystery in the way in which the forewoman received the communication of his intentions.

"You are acquainted with Marion's history, sir," said she, "and your resolution to rescue her from Mr. Bernard before her twenty-first birthday—after which, she being her own mistress, he will have little power left to harm her—is a brave and a wise one."

Harold nodded.

"You will, then," continued Mrs. Forsyth, "proceed on the assumption that she is being carried to Little Falls, where she thinks that her hapless mother is still alive and a prisoner?"

"Yes; with a flying visit to Richburg on the way."

"That is well, sir, allow me to say. Richburg is Mr. Bernard's residence, and the stronghold of Mr. Bernard's influence and power. But I do not think you will find anything there, beyond a confirmation of the main points in Marion's history, as given by herself, if that is one thing that you are after."

"It is not one thing that I am after," said Harold. "What are you thinking of? Nothing that I have received from Marion Bernard's pure lips can require confirmation."

"Ah, to be sure," said Mrs. Forsyth, composedly. "Your operations will then be confined almost from the outset to the wild region in the vicinity of Lake Falls?"

"At present I think so."

"I want to ask a favor of you, sir."

"That is well."

"You will doubtless leave your business in the hands of Mr. Quick, your superintendent?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I want you to give me the privilege of discharging myself from my position as forewoman in your establishment and appointing a competent person in my place at my discretion."

Harold stared.

"Why should you wish this, Mrs. Forsyth?" he asked.

"No matter; will you grant me the privilege and communicate the same to Mr. Quick?"

"I don't know about that."

"Well, then, I will explain."

"Proceed, if you please."

"Circumstances—anticipated by me alone—may arise, by which I may be of material assistance to you in this forthcoming search and rescue."

"Ah!"

"Yes; and it is solely contingent on those circumstances that I would make use of the requested privilege."

"It is granted, then. But—"

"Thank you kindly, sir. But what?"

"I was about to say that it is not likely you will be able to assist me very materially."

They had now arrived before Mrs. Forsyth's door.

She adjusted her spectacles with an odd little laugh and then held out her hand.

"You shouldn't say that so confidently, Mr. Harcourt," said she. "It strikes me that I have already worn out one sun-umbrella on Mr. Bernard's head, besides subsequently proving myself something of a boatwoman and furnishing our dear Marion with her first haven of refuge."

Harold grasped her hand.

"Forgive my forgetfulness!" he exclaimed. "By Jove! you did all that, and more, too. Well, you have the privilege you requested. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir," said Mrs. Forsyth, earnestly. "And a Godspeed to both you and Jerry, sir!"

Harold next hurried to a telegraph-station, where he sent a dispatch to both Mr. Quick and a notary public to meet him at his home at eight o'clock on the following morning.

He then hurried homeward.

It was nearly midnight, and the street seemed wholly deserted.

Just, however, as he was about to ascend the steps of his domicile, while searching for his night-key, a brawny ruffian sprang from behind a tree, aiming a terrific blow at him with a huge bludgeon.

Without an exclamation, though taken by surprise, the young man narrowly evaded the blow and dealt the fellow a smash in the jaw, straight from the shoulder, that sent him staggering.

Before he could follow up the advantage, however, a second assailant leaped into view, knife in hand.

Both ruffians wore masks.

The second was repelled even more summarily and scientifically than his predecessor, and then, as blow after blow was rained upon their masked faces with lightning-like rapidity by the young man's pugilistic address, the pair of them seemed wholly nonplused.

"Let's get out of this," growled one. "This cove is a holy hurricane!"

And, followed by his companion, he took to his heels with a speed that defied all idea of pursuit.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AIR-GUN.

HAROLD smiled as he found himself so soon and unexpectedly master of the field.

"A holy hurricane!" he repeated to himself. "Whether those scoundrels were Mr. Bernard's agents, or only chance ruffians on their own account, there is no denying the odd coincidence of that remark. One might call it a mysterious echo of the adjective I applied to myself in the vow that Jerry Cleaver has taken with me. So be it, then. Henceforth let me prove myself a Hurricane Detective, indeed, until William Bernard is brought to an account, and the beautiful, long-suffering Marion is my well-earned reward!"

He met his mother, who was sitting up for him, without any mention of his last adventure.

To his surprise, he found her in tears.

In her hand was a message from Fanny, received early in the evening, which she mutely handed to him, after bowing her forehead for his welcoming kiss.

Harold read the missive with more indignation than amazement.

It merely acknowledged the fact of her secret marriage with Albert Guernsey several years previously, as the outcome of a foolish boarding-school romance, also the birth of her child, together with a brief explanation as to how she had managed to hoodwink her relatives and the world at large in regard to the matter, and concluded by saying that she was gone off with her boy, with the intention of remaining in retirement until such time as a divorce, to be obtained at Major Moreton's expense, should enable her to contract an honorable alliance with that chivalric gentlemen, and burst upon the fashionable world with the *éclat* that his presumed lofty position in society would facilitate.

She would send or call for her wardrobe on the following day.

Such was the substance of Fanny Guernsey's explanatory farewell to the kind and indulgent widowed mother whose whole life had been more or less of a self-sacrifice to her whims and ingratitude.

And the tone of it was absolutely heartless, without the least intimation of affectionate regret on the part of the writer.

Harold tossed the missive from him with an expression of hard contemptuousness.

"No more than I expected!" was his comment. "Good riddance!"

Mrs. Harcourt was still weeping.

"Oh, my son! but can I forget that she is still my daughter?" she sobbed.

"Mother, you must forget it!" said the young man, sternly. "She is unworthy of you—has never been aught but unworthy of you. Good riddance, I say! That you do not curse her outright is far more than the miserable creature deserves."

"Curse her? Ah, I could never do that, Harold!"

They were seated in the parlor.

"No; I am aware of that!" And he drew the stricken parent to his side and kissed her. "You are an angel!"

There had never in all the world been a more affectionate and dutiful son than Harold Harcourt.

"I am almost heart-broken!" sighed the widow, nevertheless trying to compose herself. "I infer then, my son, that these revelations of Fanny's have been known to you for some time."

"Yes, mother; almost, if not quite as well as her hideous treachery and heartlessness. Listen."

And he forthwith told her of Marion's adventures, and of Fanny's unenviable connection therewith, together with the detective compact which he had entered into with the brave Jerry Cleaver.

Mrs. Harcourt's astonishment can be better imagined than described.

It was a fresh blow for her to know that her son would be compelled to leave her, perhaps for an indefinite period, at this critical time, but she had come to love Marion as a daughter, the young girl's misfortunes challenged every sympathy in her benevolent nature, and she resolved to submit without demur.

"It terrifies me to part with you, my son," said she, kissing him. "But next to your duty to me is that which you owe to Marion Bernard, your distressed and beautiful betrothed, and you shall carry my blessings and prayers with you on this dangerous mission."

"Noble mamma! I knew you would say that," exclaimed the young man, joyfully.

"God bless you for it! Now for bed. I am worn out, and must rise early."

He arose to light a pretty little chamber-lamp for his mother, as had long been a loving custom of his, and reached with a lamp-lighter to the one burner ablaze in the chandelier.

Suddenly there was a whistling sound, the lamp was shattered in his hand, and, with a slight thud, but without any report, a large bullet buried itself in one of the folding-doors directly in line with a front window that had not yet been closed.

"That was from an air-gun!" cried Harold, springing to the window, while his mother gave a little scream. "By Jupiter! is the very air rifle with assassination?"

Mrs. Harcourt frantically grasped him as he was about to leap out.

"Don't dare to expose yourself afresh!" she gasped. "Another shot may be the death of you!"

But such prudence was not in the make-up of the Hurricane Detective, as he had not inaptly described himself.

Even as he spoke there was another whistling sound, and a fresh bullet whizzed between them, clipping a short curl from over the young man's right ear in its passage.

The next moment Harold had launched himself with gymnastic dexterity out of the case-ment, and was pursuing a fugitive figure up the lonely street with the headlong intensity of a tempest in pursuit of a withered leaf.

The fugitive was captured and collared before an entire block had been traversed.

But he was an innocent-looking young fellow, evidently a chance wayfarer, and he carried no air-gun, or any other weapon.

"Let me go!" he panted, struggling desperately, and evidently half-beside himself with fright. "Do you want to shoot at me again?"

"Shoot at you again?" repeated Harold, bewilderedly. "I have been a target, but have shot at no one! What do you mean?"

He released the man, who was no less bewildered than he, though now with a glimmering as to the true state of the case.

"Why, I thought it was at me, and that is why I took to my heels," said he. "I was just passing yonder lighted window" [he pointed back to the one out of which Harold had precipitated himself] "when the shot whizzed by my head and I heard something smash. Then I ran, and another shot followed almost immediately."

"I probably owe you an apology," said Harold. "Pray, retrace your steps with me for a moment."

The man complied.

As they approached the house there was another shot, which this time grazed Harold's shirt-collar, and then an agile figure with a masked face slid down out of a tree before the parlor window and the long, slender, glistening barrel of an air-gun shimmered in the uncertain light.

"Baffled again!" was called out, in a harsh, disappointed voice. "But better luck next time. The enemies of William Bernard must and shall be destroyed."

Then he dashed away with the speed of the wind.

Nevertheless, Harold and his new-found companion sprung in pursuit for a short distance, until satisfied that it would be hopeless.

"I say," said the stranger, affably, as they once more retraced their steps in the direction of the Harcourt mansion, "this thing is just awful!"

"It is rather tough," assented Harold, thoughtfully.

"Tough! why, it's downright persistently murderous!" exclaimed the other, with considerable warmth. "Of course, Mr. Harcourt, I wouldn't presume to pry into your private affairs, but—"

"Excuse me," interrupted the other, in no little surprise, "but how happens it that you know my name?"

"I live not a great way from here," was the prompt reply, "and you have been pointed out to me more than once."

"Oh! Well, then?"

"I was about to say that, though I wouldn't think of intruding into your private affairs, I can't imagine who can be pursuing you so relentlessly."

"It isn't necessary to imagine it," said Harold; and he examined the young man's face yet more critically without being able to "place it," as the saying goes.

"Oh, pardon the remark then, please. I only thought I might be of some service to you."

This was said deferentially, even humbly, and Harold was in a certain measure prepossessed.

"You seem to forget that you have the advantage of me," said he, kindly. "I don't know you."

"Know me now, then!"

Harold sprung aside barely in time to avoid a handful of red pepper, thrown by the innocent-appearing stranger's hand and intended for his eyes, while a long, keen-bladed dagger rose, flashed and descended, aimed unerringly at his defenseless breast.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CUP OF CHOCOLATE.

"DUPE and fool!" called out the stranger's voice, while the dagger was already descending upon its seemingly assured victim's breast. "You are thenceforth begirt by foes in manifold guise, unless you surrender all designs of interference in William Bernard's plans. Die in your tracks!"

But at that instant Mrs. Harcourt, alarmed at her son's continued absence, came to the window, under which they were standing, with the shattered night-lamp in her hands.

Horried, but by no means paralyzed at the unexpected spectacle of her son's fresh peril, she gave a shrill cry, and hurled the lamp, which was partly of metal and sufficiently heavy, full in the would-be assassin's face at the critical instant.

Staggered by the blow, it was only the cross-shaped hilt, in lieu of the blade, of the descending poniard that found its mark on the young man's breast, though with sufficient force to half-knock the wind out of him for a moment.

Before he could wholly recover the scoundrel darted away, with a muttered curse, and disappeared.

A moment later Harold stood again in the parlor, after having secured the door, with his mother looking white and blank in a rocking-chair at his side, and holding something in her hand, which she occasionally stooped to kiss with her quivering lips.

"Who would have suspected that last fellow's diabolism?" said the young man thoughtfully to himself. "Verily, I can scarcely believe that he exaggerated the dangers that encompass me. I do, indeed, seem, as he said, 'begirt by foes in manifold guise.'"

But it was with no outward trace of this anxiety that he laid his hand caressingly on his mother's comely head a moment thereafter.

"Oh, my son!" she moaned. "You are all that is left to me now. But I shall lose even you, if you persist in this desperate enterprise. I shall lose you even more irretrievably than I have lost your unnatural sister; for she at least is yet alive, while a violent death will be sure to carry you off."

"Nonsense! Be of stronger heart, my darling mother," said the young man, in his deep, resonant and confident voice. "What is it that you are treasuring there so lovingly?"

She opened her hand, disclosing a crisp-curling lock of hair.

"It was clipped from your dear head by that first noiseless bullet," said she, simply. "I shall have it secured in a locket, and never part with it from my person while you are away from me."

"I would sooner have it repose in your dear bosom," said Harold, with his grave smile, "than in any other such tender and adored resting-place—except one, perhaps," he softly added, with a slight flush. "Keep it there, my mother. It will be a sort of talisman of safety for me."

"Alas! I fear not." She again pressed her lips to the ringlet, after turning up a hurried glance to him. "My son, my son! it may soon be all of you that is left to me."

"Do not believe it."

"Harold, relinquish this quest!"

"Mother, I cannot—I must not!"

"Not for my sake, Harold?"

His manly face grew troubled and softened, but only for an instant.

"And leave my Marion, my betrothed wife, at the mercy of her inhuman enemy, like a craven and a coward! Is that what you would have me do for your sake, my mother?"

A struggle ensued in her motherly heart, a fierce struggle, with selfish love as its chief contestant, but her nobler, loftier motherhood proved equal to the emergency.

She arose and kissed him with a new and grand composure.

"No, not that, Harold," said she, gently.

"You shall not be called upon to sacrifice your manly honor for even my sake, though death confronted you at every turn. Good-night, my son!"

They separated at last.

Called betimes early on the following morning, after a too brief but still recuperating sleep, Harold found both Mr. Quick and the legal gentleman awaiting him, in obedience to his telegrams of the preceding night.

The business was speedily dispatched, by which Mr. Superintendent Quick—a most worthy and efficient man, in whom every confidence could be safely placed—was furnished with an ample power of attorney to transact the book-binding business in the master's absence.

Then, after carefully packing his valise, with his mother's advice and assistance, the pair sat down to an unusually late breakfast, at half-past eight.

During the discussion of the meal, Harold gave his mother some particulars as to his immediate plans, besides apprising her of Jerry Cleaver's anticipated visit by appointment.

"I am glad that young man is to be your comrade," said Mrs. Harcourt, with an assumption of hopefulness. "From the heroic part

you say he took in yesterday's exciting adventures, I shall feel better for thinking that he is with you."

"He has a giant's strength and a lion's courage, with a heart of gold," said Harold. "The only thing puzzling to me is why he should want to share Miss Moreton's rescue with me at all, apart from his intense eagerness to do so."

But this was already no mystery to Mrs. Harcourt's woman's intuition.

"Dear Harold! what a treasure of obtuseness you are!" said she. "So that puzzles you, eh?"

"Of course it does, mamma. Why shouldn't it?"

"Oh, there is no special reason why it shouldn't, my son. Miss Bernard, however, is a very charming girl."

"Self-evident! But what has that to do with it?"

"I didn't say it had anything to do with it, you dear boy!"

It was their custom to finish their breakfast with their coffee or chocolate, instead of taking the beverage with their food, as is the prevailing and reprehensible American custom; and at this moment they were interrupted by the voice of the servant in angry altercation with some one in the kitchen, which was only separated from the dining-room by a short passage, with pantries at the sides.

"Go 'long wid you, ye ongrateful shpalpeen!" the cook was heard to exclaim, at last. "Not another crust do you'se get at this back doore! Wasn't it enough that I gave ye the meat scraps two-blissid mornin's hand-running, that ye should attmpt to put your dirty paw into the coffee-pot the minute the back av me was turned? Get out, I say, an' bad luck till yees!"

Then there was a violent slamming of a door, the house-parrot, swinging in his gilded cage just over Harold's back, after being uncommonly quiet thus far (that is, for a parrot), squawked and sputtered in keeping with the general uproar, and then the cook made her appearance, looking still flustered and indignant, and bearing the two smoking cups of chocolate on a salver.

Mrs. Harcourt, though uniformly kind to her servants, was too wise a mistress to be over-indulgent.

"Such interruptions are disagreeable, Ellen," said she. "Whom were you addressing so violently?"

Ellen instantly resumed her good-nature, notwithstanding that the parrot vociferated and screamed all the louder at sight of the steaming cups, for which she had a tropical partiality.

"Oh, ma'am, forgive me!" said she, a little shamefacedly. "It was only a poor divil of a beggar-man, as I've occasionally fed wid scraps at the back doore, an' I'm sorry now that I was so howlin' mad at the loikes of him. But when the persumin' creatur' made bowld to peep into the beautiful chockylat as it was simmerin', why—"

"Never mind the particulars, if you please, Ellen," interposed Harold, smiling, as his cup was set down before him. "Don't you see that Polly is just ravenous for her morning treat? Open her cage-door for her, and give her a chance."

This was done, and, as the servant disappeared, the jovial green bird, which had long been a favorite in the household, chucklingly made her way to Harold's shoulder, and reached down, beak apart and neck awry, for her customary tid-bit of bread soaked in chocolate, which was yet too hot for her master to eat.

"How Polly will miss you!" said Mrs. Harcourt, as the feeding of the bird went on.

"Yes, likely enough," said Harold, about to raise his cup to his lips, after soaking a final crumb for Polly. "But she is not the one by whom I shall be chiefly missed, I am certain enough of that."

And he cast a fond look at his mother.

Just then an alarmed look in her face astonished him.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed.

For answer she pointed to the bird on his shoulder, which at the same instant rolled from its perch in convulsions.

Presently it was dead.

"Treachery everywhere!" exclaimed Mrs. Harcourt, aghast. "It must be that the chocolate is poisoned! Thank Heaven! neither of us have tasted of it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE TRAIL.

It was such a narrow escape that nothing more was thought of the unfortunate parrot, whose loss was to be more keenly felt subsequently, and the cook was instantly summoned.

Of course, she was simply dumfounded, though there could be no other inference than that poison had been introduced into the beverage by the "beggarman," and it was not likely that he would put in another appearance after the infamous attempt.

Harold smelled of the chocolate, and even took some of it in his mouth, voiding it immediately in the cuspidor.

"Arsenic or strychnine!" he exclaimed: "I can't tell which, though probably a mixture of

the two. Take it away, Ellen, and be sure you throw it in the ashes."

The woman seemed half-scared out of her wits, while Mrs. Harcourt was very pale.

The beggar, it seemed, had visited the kitchen three times before, on the preceding successive days.

Subsequently questioned, Ellen described him minutely, and from this description Harold had not a doubt that it was but another deadly emissary of Mr. Bernard in tramp's disguise.

During the excitement consequent upon this incident the housemaid entered from the hall to announce the arrival of Mr. Jerry Cleaver, and the clock at the same moment began to strike nine.

Jerry was at once brought into the dining-room, introduced to Mrs. Harcourt (who was at once prepossessed with him), and, after the dismissal of the frightened domestics, made acquainted not only with the last startling incident, but also with everything that had chanced since his last separation with Harold.

The honest fellow scratched his head in a sort of horrified perplexity.

"I can't realize it all, an' that's just the truth," said he, helplessly. "Are we back in the old poisonin', dagger-an'-bowl days of the Lucrezians an' the Borgians, or are we still in the jumpin'-up, enlightened times of the nineteenth century? That's the question."

Mrs. Harcourt sighed, but Harold, without replying, glanced with a good deal of satisfaction at the apparently well-filled old portmanteau that Jerry had brought into the room with him.

But the latter was next greatly concerned by the widow's pallid and generally distressed appearance.

"I say, Mr. Harold," said he at last, after some embarrassed movements with his feet and hands, "it ain't right. That is, I mean ter say it don't seem on the square to me."

"What is it that ain't right?" said Harold.

"Why, the leavin' the leddy mother in this 'ere unprotected way, you know, with all these scares an' panicky happenin's fresh in her gentle heart—that's what I mean!" continued the giant boat-builder, waxing somewhat less diffident. "Now with me an' my old mother, you see, it's summat different. Time an' time again have both 'Tom an' me gone off to a rowin' match, a cock-fight or a scrappin' bout, with tough crowds in abundance, an', as you might say, with our lives in our hands, an' she not at all uneasy, knowin' our grit, our strength an' our rough bringin'-up. But now, with a leddy for your mother, an' she bein' already skeery an' not strong to look at, with most likely no other son to look to, in case you'd get laid out, an' with the futur' prospex, so to speak, just cheese-thick with pizen, brimstun, daggers and lead pills, why, Mr. Harold, to say the least—"

Mrs. Harcourt interrupted him with a gently deprecating gesture, and then, as she arose, the wet glance that she turned upon him was full of gratitude, but also full of resolution.

"Please say no more, Mr. Cleaver," said she, in her sweet and low, but firm voice. "Your dear mother should be proud and happy in you, for your sentiments are alike creditable to your heart and your head. But my son's honor is enlisted in this venture, desperate venture, and he must not be detained. It is already past nine, your appointed hour of departure."

"But I'll go it alone, if you both say so, ma'am!" cried Jerry, with enthusiastic eagerness. "The young leddy shall still be rescued. Keep your son, if he kin be persuaded; I'll undertake the job on my own hook!"

In spite of her distress, a faint smile played about Mrs. Harcourt's lips, which was enhanced by her perceiving that Harold was still impenetrable to the ruling motive of his colossal coadjutor's eagerness to "go it alone on his own hook."

She made another gesture of dissent.

Then, after giving her hand to Jerry, she went up to her son, kissed his forehead, pressed him to her heart, and quitted the room.

At what a cost had that silent farewell been given!

As her light step passed hurriedly away, they heard something like a stifled sob, but not the less had the sacrifice been made, and she was gone.

"Come!" said Harold, huskily. "Let us get out of this."

They grasped their portmanteaus and hurried away.

Harold was soon his matter-of-fact self again.

"You seem to have more luggage than I," said he, presently, with a quizzical glance at his companion's valise. "What have you packed up for the occasion?"

"Chiefly some old duds," said Jerry, with a smile. "They're of various sorts, an' I thought they might come in handy in the way of disguises, if for nothin' else."

"That is odd," said Harold. "I thought the same in my own case, and have imitated your example. Yes, if we're to be detectives, we'll doubtless have some use for disguises."

"True as you're born!" said Jerry, cheerfully. "They all do it."

As they were buying their tickets at the Grand Central Depot for Richburg, two men crowded them so closely as to attract their attention.

"Look out for spies!" growled Jerry, in a hoarse, aside whisper that might have been heard for half a block, more or less, after the men had disappeared. "Did you twig them galoots, an' how previous they acted?"

Harold smiled and nodded.

After they had seated themselves in a crowded car, just as the train began to draw out from the station, Jerry bethought himself of something important which he had thus far forgotten.

"By Jupiter!" said he, diving into one of his breast-pockets, "what's come over my memory? I've got a clew!"

The last words were pronounced in another confidential whisper, that could be heard throughout the entire car.

"A clew?" repeated Harold.

"Yes; here it is."

Jerry produced a letter.

"Speak lower," said Harold, softly. "What is it, and where did you get it?"

"Lower, is it?" said Jerry, still hoarser, louder and more confidential. "Why, I'm already a-whisperin' my softest."

"Well, well, what is it?"

"Something I picked up on the dock this mornin', at the spot where the fu'st fight for the young leddy look place yesterday."

He handed Harold the letter.

It was a business letter addressed to Mr. William Bernard, at the hotel where the latter had been stopping.

The letter was signed "Henry Jones," was written under a printed letter-heading of Messrs. Jones & Brother, grocers, Richburg, N. Y., and, apart from business matter of no interest to an outsider, contained this sentence:

"Since you cannot say for certain whether you will stop over here on your way to Lake Falls or not, we shall keep that other matter of ours in abeyance till we see or hear from you again."

The missive bore a date that was only three days old.

"This is of some importance," said Harold, in his low, guarded voice.

"Important!" echoed honest Jerry, in his foghorn undertone. "Ha! I should say so. But mum's the word."

"I should say so, from the way you shout it out," said Harold, laughing in spite of himself.

"Shout?"

This in a deep, base aside that reverberated through the car like an earthquake.

"Never mind. Still, the letter is not so important as it might be, if making us more assured of Mr. B.'s intentions."

Jerry, little used to abbreviations, stared at him.

"Mr. Bee?" he roared. "Who in thunder is Mr. Bee?"

At this instant, somewhat to Harold's relief, who was beginning to have his doubts as to Jerry's proficiency for the *finesse* and non-committal qualities of the detective profession, the train plunged into the dark entrance of the Harlem tunnel.

When it issued into the light again a change had occurred in their surroundings.

The seat next in front of them was now occupied by the suspicious-looking men whom they had noticed at the ticket-office; the seat next behind by two other men of no less sinister aspect.

CHAPTER XIX.

SINISTER FOLLOWERS.

BOTH Harold and Jerry at once began to "size up" the new-comers in a quiet, but thorough way.

Rough, desperate-looking men, the whole four of them; such was their first impression.

Then the detectives soon became convinced that the men were perfectly well-known to each other, and in readiness to act together in concert, notwithstanding that there was a common attempt to disguise the fact.

That they, the detectives, were the special objects of their solicitude soon became equally apparent.

Harold was at first fearful lest his companion would continue his vociferous whisperings, as they might be characterized, and thus give the pair of them away.

But, much to his satisfaction, Jerry at once became becomingly discreet, only a sly wink of his blue eye, or some other facial contortion, occasionally saying quite plainly:

"I'm up to snuff, old fellow. Look sharp and wait is the watchword."

Their suspicions with regard to the four men's intentions were presently confirmed by a couple of incidents.

On traversing a short tunnel soon after passing Yonkers, Harold became aware in the darkness of an attempt to surreptitiously abstract the Bernard letter, which he had carelessly thrust into one of his breast-pockets after finishing its perusal.

Just before emerging into the light again, by a swift movement he suddenly imprisoned the hand.

It was instantly wrenched away, but not before its owner was duly recognized as the man directly behind Jerry.

"Sir," said Harold, turning to him with exasperating coolness and suavity, "you pick pockets like a tyro. Practice on a dummy a little more exclusively before trying your hand on a man who is specially wide-awake. I would, moreover, respectfully inform you that I have nothing worth stealing."

The fellow acted his part well.

He first stared, then reddened, then blustered, and all without betraying his companionship with his pals.

"What in — do you mean?" he growled, with an oath. "Would you insinuate that I have tried to pick your pocket, sir?"

"I do not insinuate, but assert it."

"You're a—"

The word "liar," then trembling on his lips, never passed them.

Harold's eyes glinted like bayonets, and, to complete the fellow's intimidation, Jerry at the same moment turned to stare at him, while softly and meditatively rubbing his nose with the knuckles of a fist that looked like an imitation prize leg of mutton carved out of ship's timber and painted with prospective gore.

The fellow muttered something under his breath, and subsided without another word, while no more notice was taken of him.

The next instant was a somewhat extraneous one, so to speak.

An insane young woman, of exceptional beauty and pitiable aspect, was brought on the train at a station a little further on.

She was unruly, without betraying other diseased mentality than hysterical excitement, and the professional keepers having her in charge were disposed to gruff and summary methods, not to say brutality.

She piteously appealed for protection and rescue to the passengers.

On the rough assurance of her insanity, however, by the keepers, these appeals were not heeded, save by the chivalric Harold and his companion.

The former at once arose and demanded a sight of the warrant by which the fair patient was restrained, which was roughly refused.

"Mind your own business, or it will be the worse for you!" growled the chief custodian, showing his teeth like a wolf, while the poor girl continued to protest wildly that she was not insane, but was being kidnapped.

"I'll take care of myself, have no fear of that," said Harold, coolly. "But the young lady doesn't appear insane to me, and you shall show the authority by which you restrain her of her liberty, or I shall know the reason why."

Instantly there was an uproar, in which the four suspicious strangers, siding with the keepers, crowded threateningly around the disputants, while the sympathies of the majority of the passengers were as unmistakably with the Hurricane Detective.

In the midst of the confusion, Jerry Cleaver quietly arose and stood by his friend's side.

His great size, his herculean proportions and his confident manner were equally impressive.

"My partner is kareet in this here rumpus," said he, waving his trip-hammer of a fist airily aloft with a gentle dignity. "The gal doesn't look looney, an' she sha'n't be made to stir a peg without the commitment dockyments bein' produced!"

And then he laid his giant hand soothingly on the head of the sobbing girl, in a way that was suggestive of a sympathetic elephant trying to stroke down a dormouse.

The keepers, however, remained stubborn and defiant, being encouraged thereto by the four suspicious strangers.

"Don't give in to these intermeddlin' galoots," advised one of them, a powerfully built, beetle-browed man. "Stick to your rights. They ben't o' no 'count, anyway."

"That's the talk," interposed another, who was no less formidable-looking. "Show up nothin'. We'll stand by you every time."

"Hallo!" said Jerry, smiling urtanely. "Didn't some one let off his mouth? What champion Big Four is comin' to the front, I wonder?"

With that he collared the pair of them and set about rubbing their ears together with a firm gentleness and conscientious thoroughness that were good to see.

Here the entrance of the conductor, who took the part of the two friends, put an end to the disturbance.

The keepers produced their papers showing that their charge was really insane, and their authority genuine.

They quitted the train at the next station, and the incident was at an end.

But, besides showing Harold and his companion in a humane and not undesirable light, it had also served the purpose of betraying the confraternity of the Big Four, as Jerry had not inaptly characterized them, which was one point in favor of the detectives, to say the least.

Indeed, the quartette no longer made any pretense of being unfamiliar with each other, but now chatted together quite freely, seemingly without paying any further attention to

the two friends, by whom they were quietly ignored in their turn.

The last station before reaching Richburg was reached shortly before noon, and the car was so oppressively warm that at last Jerry, with a nod to Harold, stepped out on the front platform for a chat with one of the trainmen who chanced to be standing there, and whom he thought he recognized as an old acquaintance.

The train was going at the rate of about thirty miles an hour at the time.

Harold thought nothing of the circumstance at the moment, but the fact of the two men in the seat next ahead at once following Jerry out upon the platform quickened his suspicions.

He had only time to notice that the trainman had disappeared into the next car forward, and that Jerry was carelessly bandying compliments with the men who had followed him, when one of those in the seat behind (not the tyro at pocket-picking, however), endeavored to engage him in conversation.

Convinced that the sole object of the attempt was to induce him to turn his back on what might be going on on the platform, he curtly resisted it, and then, quickly rising, went toward the door.

Unobserved by him, however, the men who had striven to distract his attention were just as prompt in following him.

He quickened his pace as he saw the two conspirators suddenly precipitate themselves upon Jerry, with the intention of hurling him from the train.

Jerry, taken by surprise, staggered to the dangerous edge, and then went stumbling down the steps at one side.

CHAPTER XX.

AT THIRTY MILES AN HOUR.

HAROLD sprung to the door, tore it open, with a warning cry, and was out upon the platform in a flash.

But he need not have been so concerned for Jerry's personal sake.

The latter had already recovered his equilibrium, turned like a tiger at bay, and his cowardly assailants were in his tremendous clutch, one in either hand.

But he had not effected this without once more losing his balance.

In fact, just as Harold reached the platform, Jerry, with a sort of snarl, like that of a wild animal when bearing off its prey, sprung off backward, still clutching the brace of ruffians in his grip.

Then Harold was himself hurled across the intersecting platforms by an unexpected assault of the companion villains who had followed him unawares, and who flung themselves upon him with an immense shock.

As they did so, however, one of them stumbled and went down between the cars.

There he hung more than half-way down, struggling in vain to extricate himself, and yelling for the mercy that he would so ruthlessly have denied to his intended victim.

As his companion turned, irresolute, undetermined whether to help his friend or continue the assault, Harold, now with his second wind and his energies well in hand, tackled him in a resentful grapple.

"Scoundrel!" he exclaimed between his grinding teeth; "you shall confess your hireling employment, or share your fellow-miscreant's fate."

At this juncture a brakeman came running out to the entrapped ruffian's assistance.

But he was too late.

With a last yell, an appalling screech, the miserable scoundrel's hold relapsed at that instant.

He disappeared between the cars, and there was a momentary jolt or two as the body was ground and pounded to pieces under the rushing wheels.

By this time Harold and the remaining ruffian were struggling and swaying back and forth over the oscillating platforms in a terrible grapple, in which, however, the address and courage of the Hurricane Detective seemed to be slowly and steadily asserting the ascendancy.

The horrified brakeman had not witnessed the outset of the struggle, but he seemed to divine instinctively that Harold was in the right.

He dashed forward to reinforce him just as the pair came to a tottering, fierce-locked poise at the head of the same steps down which the indomitable Jerry had made his outward leap with his captives in his grip.

"Be careful or you'll be overboard!" yelled the trainman, vainly trying to secure a grasp on both contestants. "Give me a chance, sir!" this last to Harold. "I'll help you drag him back!"

But Harold's thoughts were now recurring to Jerry's uncertain fate, and at the same time he succeeded in securing a conquering grip on his antagonist.

"Not if I know it, young man!" was his growled response. "Harold Harcourt, the Hurricane Detective, follows his partner through thick and thin—even to the death!"

With that he sprung with his opponent far out into the air, and was seen no more.

There was a tempestuous rush of air, a sensation first as of flying on nothing, then as of the landscape spinning around in a circle, and then the two men came down with a sliding sort of thud.

Fortunately they fell in a dry swamp, full of bunched bog-grass, the ruffian undermost, and neither of them was seriously injured, though both were naturally enough greatly shaken by the shock.

Harold was the first to scramble to his feet, while the other rolled himself over and over, after which he lay in one place, flopping and groaning.

"Get up!" said Harold, drawing his revolver and covering him.

"Hold on, mister," whined the other. "The train will like enough slow up and then put back for us."

"And that is just what I don't want—for the present, at least. Get up, I tell you!"

The revolver glistened ominously in the sunlight, and there was an imperative inflection in the command.

The scoundrel got upon his feet, slowly feeling himself over, to make sure that no bones were broken, and at the same time casting distrustful glances at his captor.

"I acknowledge my defeat, mister," he whimpered. "What are you goin' to do?"

"Forward, march!"

Harold compelled him to walk in the advance and then headed toward a clump of woodland that ceased skirting the track about fifty rods further back.

On the other side was the river, with its wild and romantic highlands opposite—a weird, lonely and picturesque spot, with not a single habitation in sight.

Harold's object was to penetrate the wood back to the spot where Jerry had leaped off the train, and satisfy himself as to his fate.

He gloomily anticipated the worst.

As they were about entering the wood, the captive ventured to pause, look back and expostulate afresh.

"Now, look here, mister," said he, "I give in. That's enough, ain't it? But why go into this pesky woodland, where the train fellers can't find us if they put back, as I reckon they will?"

"I don't want to be found just yet awhile. Go on!"

"But look here, mister, if—"

"Forward, march!"

The drawn revolver was again presented, the steely inflection was once more in the commanding voice, and the march was resumed without further question.

"Poor Jake! poor, poor Jake!" the prisoner was heard to murmur in a broken voice. "If you was a tough 'un, it was a horrible death what scooped you in at last, an' perhaps the Lord'll forgive you."

Harold inferred that it was his late companion he was lamenting, and he began to experience a slight feeling of sympathy.

But at this moment he chanced to trip on a root in the improvised path they were pursuing.

Before he could wholly recover the prisoner had wheeled in his tracks, whipped out a revolver and fired point-blank at his head.

The bullet, however, had failed, though narrowly, of its billet.

Pistol-practice had long been a favorite recreation of the Hurricane Detective's.

He was a dead shot.

In a scarcely appreciable instant, he had fired in return.

But not to kill, little as the mercy was deserved.

The still smoking revolver flew out of the discomfited prisoner's grasp, broken short off at the lock by the forty-four caliber ball that unerringly struck it.

"Stand up against that tree!" was the next command.

It was tremblingly obeyed.

"Shell out whatever other weapon you may have concealed on your treacherous person."

A revolver, the companion to the one rendered useless, was surrendered.

"You have doubtless a dagger, too. Out with it!"

The dagger was also forthcoming.

"Any other weapon?"

The prisoner shook his head.

"I wouldn't believe you on oath. Be quick; there's something else."

"By the Lord Almighty, mister, there ain't nothin' else! You've got everything but my pocket-knife."

"Out with that, then! I take no further chances with you."

The pocket-knife was likewise surrendered, and then the compulsory march through the woods was resumed.

They presently came to another swamp, very similar to the one in which they had first struck *terra firma*.

Here Harold, much to his satisfaction, came upon a much-trampled and indented spot, which

seemed to mark where Jerry and his two assailants might have alighted.

His satisfaction was speedily changed to anxiety, however, for there were plentiful blood-marks on the grass here and there.

While taking his bearings, he was sturdily hailed from an adjacent clump of swamp willows, and then he saw Jerry, with a smile of wonder and delight upon his broad, honest face, waving a hand to him.

Harold joyfully marshaled his prisoner toward the spot, and then the pair clasped hands, and exchanged such explanations as were in order.

Jerry was uninjured.

One of his prisoners was tied to a tree, looking glum, disconsolate and half-defiant.

The other was dead at his feet—a mangled and crushed form.

Jerry pointed to the dead body.

"He was my buffer when we struck ground—him underneath," said he, scratching his head.

"But for that, I might have been a goner—I'm so thunderin' hefty, you know."

"What were you going to do with the other?" asked Harold, indicating the man tied to the tree.

"Faith, and I hardly know, my boy," said Jerry, scratching his scalp yet harder. "I've been sort of cross-questioning him, you see, but he remains as dumb as a fish. I was half-determined to cut his ears off when you chanced along."

"Let me help you," said Harold. "And suppose we double the witnesses to be examined first."

He lashed his own prisoner against a tree, side by side with the one similarly ornamented, and produced both his own revolver and the one he had confiscated.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SLAVISH COMMUNITY.

JERRY looked on curiously, and grinned with boyish anticipation.

Though he felt certain that no murder was intended, the situation, after his own hard experience, was just nuts to him.

Not so, however, with at least one of the prisoners (Harold's), who at once began to beg piteously for his life, though his companion remained comparatively unmoved.

Harold presented himself before the former, about ten yards distant, with the pistol in his right hand leveled.

"Your name?" said he, sternly.

"Now, look here, mister, what kin my name matter to you? You've got me squarely licked, and—"

Bang! from the revolver, and a bullet fanned the fellow's left ear before burying itself in the tree.

A dolorous howl, accompanied by the words: "Oh, Lord! John Yager, at your service, sir."

"Who employed you to attempt the assassination of my comrade and myself?"

"I can't tell you that, mister; indeed, I can't. I daren't. I'm oath-bound, you see, and—"

Bang! and a fanning of the other ear, this time so close as to draw blood.

"Oh, racky! Mr. Bernard, Mr. William Bernard, of Richburg, hired me—that is, me and my pal what was killed—to do it."

"Were you one of the ruffians concerned in the abduction of the young lady at the Harlem River Dock yesterday evening, likewise at Mr. William Bernard's instance?"

"Lord save and bless us, mister! how kin you imagine anything so ridiculous? Why, we, that is, me and my pal, you know—"

Bang! the fellow's mustache was perceptibly disturbed by the leaden reminder.

"For God's sake, mister, don't ag'in! Your hand might shake—you might plug me by mistake, you know. Yes, I was one of 'em."

"Will you sign a written confession, containing full particulars of the crimes you verbally acknowledge, and of Mr. William Bernard's connection therewith?"

"What! my name, in black and white?"

"Yes, and duly attested."

"Oh, come, now, mister! You're kinder-hearted nor that. You wouldn't go for to demand—"

Bang! his bull-neck, just above the shirt-collar, showed a thin, reddish streak, along which the bullet had sped.

"Oh, Lord o' massy! Yes, yes; anything you please!"

"That will do for the present."

Harold turned his attention to the next captive, and began his cross-examination on the same heroic principles.

But he was of more unflinching stuff than his predecessor.

Beyond the telling of his name, which was given as Patrick Mallock, he withstood a good deal of bullet-shaving before he would submit to the inquisition.

At last, however, after the lobe of one ear had been clipped, the flap of the other neatly nicked, and several other bullets had softly scratched his outline on their passage into the tree-bark, he weakened as incontinently as the other, and the primary investigation was at an end.

Then Harold, putting up his shooting-iron,

seated himself on a stump, and produced some portable writing materials that he, fortunately, carried on his person.

"Cut 'em loose, Jerry," said he, "and then hold 'em in readiness. But don't neglect to disarm that chap of yours first."

Jerry grinned all over.

"I've drawn his teeth long ago, Mr. Harold," said he, and he set about obeying orders. In the mean time, Harold was writing rapidly, but at the same time with much care.

When he had finished an unvarnished account of the abduction and the attempted assassinations in which the prisoners had acknowledged their active participation at Mr. Bernard's instigation, in the form of an affidavit, he read it aloud to them.

They acquiesced in the correctness of the statements, and then affixed their signatures, Harold and Jerry attesting to the same.

After folding up the document, and putting it in his pocket, Harold further addressed the culprits, saying:

"As soon as we reach Richburg, about five miles north of this, your written confession of crimes will be placed in the hands of a magistrate, and warrants will be issued for your arrest. In the mean time, we are more merciful than you deserve. We shall make you a present of the intervening time in which to make your escape, if you can."

He led them to the edge of the clump, pointed southward across the swamp and along the railroad line.

"Git!" was the last word he pronounced.

They lost no time in taking to their heels.

"What's the good of swearin' out a warrant ag'in' 'em, if you're goin' to let 'em off scot-free that way, Mr. Harold?" asked Jerry, when the two men had disappeared.

"Perhaps we'll forget about the warrant," said Harold, smiling. "We're not courting publicity, you know, and this confession that we've secured is valuable at any time."

"Oho!"

Then Jerry glanced at the dead body in the clump.

"How about that?" he inquired.

"It is no concern of ours. We are not undertakers. Come!"

They set out to walk to Richburg, purposely making a long *détour* before seeking the line of railroad again, in order to avoid the spot where the other nameless ruffian had met his tragic death.

Soon after getting on the level ground between the rails, Jerry, who had been for a long time eying his companion with silent admiration, suddenly clapped him between the shoulders and gave a ringing whoop.

"What's the matter?" said Harold.

"By jingo! but you're a brick," roared the giant.

"In what way?"

"As a shooter! I've seen Bogardus, Ira Paine, and the rest of 'em, with their shotguns an' their glass balls; but you can lay over the best of 'em, Mr. Harold. By Jupiter! I'm proud of you."

"There's a pair of us, then," said Harold, modestly. "For, most assuredly I am proud of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, yes; and you needn't look so unconscious about it, either."

"But I really don't know what you mean, friend."

"Why, that jump of yours from the speeding train, with a baffled assassin in either grip! Why, man alive, it was unparalleled!"

"Was it, though?"

And the naïve surprise and gratification in Jerry's tone were altogether unaffected.

They had seen a number of horror-seekers about the spot where the ruffian had fallen between the cars, and had therefore quickened their pace.

At last they met a man who told them that Richburg was only a mile further on.

A little later, a shout was heard behind, and they were overtaken by a swiftly-driven hand-car, which whizzed past them, with two men at the break.

A jeering cry was borne back to them on the wind, and it was only then that they recognized the fellows as their recent prisoners.

"What in thunder can that mean?" ejaculated Jerry.

"Mischief, I am afraid," said Harold, mending his pace. "Come, let us make haste."

Jerry was willing enough to comply, but at the same time he was greatly mystified.

"Mischief!" he repeated. "Why, what mischief can they make for us, with the dead wood we've got on 'em?"

"They can tell their side of the story first, which is a good deal," said Harold. "And besides that, let us not forget that Richburg is Mr. Bernard's home, where he is said to have a vast amount of money and political influence."

"Oh!" And Jerry also grew painfully reflective.

Their anxiety proved to be not without cause. At the entrance to Richburg, which turned out to be a small but compact river town, little more than a hamlet in population, they were

met by a constable, accompanied by a throng of sightseers and idlers.

He at once presented a warrant of arrest, sworn out by John Yager and Patrick Mallock, charging them severally with having caused the death of the two men who had been killed, while engaged in the commission of a felonious assault.

Harold burst into a laugh, while Jerry accepted the embarrassing situation with equal good-nature.

"All right," said Harold to the constable. "Conduct us at once to the justice who issued this warrant, and we'll soon set this matter straight. There will also be found at the station our valises, which were checked to Richburg."

This frank manner of talking created a good impression, which was further increased on the way to the magistrate's office by the account of the tragic adventure which the young men gave for the benefit of the constable and his crowd.

But in an unfortunate moment Jerry also began to inveigh against Mr. William Bernard and his connection with the affair in unmeasured terms, and the good effect that had been produced was at once mysteriously counteracted.

Harold signed him to be quiet, but the mischief was already done.

The crowd either drew away from them, or assumed threatening looks.

It was a one-sided district in politics, and Mr. William Bernard, independently of his wealth and social prominence, was its political boss.

Arriving at the magistrate's office, a fresh difficulty presented itself.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RUSTIC SOLON.

"SQUIRE JONES isn't in," announced the constable, after going into the office and coming back. "Won't be back till dusk."

"And it is now but the middle of the afternoon," said Harold. "We must be getting along, after making a few inquiries in your village."

"It ain't a village, but a city," declared the constable, bristling up.

"Oho!"

"Yes, siree! And you chaps is in custody. And you won't be gettin' along without Squire Jones's permission."

He was a pompous but gawky individual, and hereat the surrounding yokels positively set up a cheer.

Harold laughed, while Jerry, who was rapidly losing his temper, remained frowningly silent.

"But suppose you confront us with our accusers on the spot," said Harold. "I suppose they're on hand somewhere, aren't they?"

But they weren't on hand. It even appeared that they had decamped, none knew whither, directly after swearing to the charges.

"Nice men, both of 'em!" commented Harold. "Well, we'll get our luggage at the station, and then await Squire Jones's arrival at some public house."

"No, you won't," said the constable, whose head seemed to be addled with his little brief authority. "I've got you-uns in custody, and I'm going to keep you in custody."

The crowd cheered again.

"Why, you infernal jackass!" cried Harold, losing patience at last, "why don't you take us to jail, then?"

"There ain't no jail. Look here, young feller, keep civil. I ain't to be bluffed by no York City man what ever drowed the breath of life."

Jerry raised his ponderous fist aloft and shook his mighty frame like an aroused elephant.

"Only say the word, Mr. Harold," said he, "and I'll clean out the town."

The countrymen edged away well out of reach before cheering again, while the official looked embarrassed and scratched his head with the fence-stake he carried for a baton.

But by this time Harold had recovered his temper.

"You say this is a city," said he, genially. "Lead us to the mayor, then. I'll soon satisfy him of our innocence."

"The mayor ain't to hum, nuther," said the constable, sulkily. "He's teaming muck down around his pickle-factory, two miles away."

It was finally decided that the prisoners might obtain their baggage and proceed to the hotel without the dignity of the law being seriously compromised, and this was accordingly done.

But by this time the crowd had increased to a great mob (great for Richburg), nearly all the inhabitants of the town being on the street.

Moreover, the tavern to which our friends were conducted proved to be the property of Mr. Bernard, with its tap-room as the headquarters of the dominant political faction that deified him.

They were half-famished, but a meal was furnished them unwillingly, and even their display of wealth at the bar did not wholly mollify the bartender, who, like all the rest, regarded them with suspicion and distrust.

This feeling continued to grow alarmingly as it became generally known that the strangers had spoken slightly of Mr. Bernard, even to

the extent of accusing him of complicity with criminals.

As night began to set in the place was beset by half the inhabitants of the entire country-side, and there was danger of the house being mobbed.

The return of the magistrate to his office put an end to all this.

A brief interview was sufficient for him to declare the prisoners innocent, in spite of himself, but he was none the less a creature of Mr. Bernard's—in fact, he was the same Mr. Jones whose letter to that magnate was now in their possession, though this was prudently withheld from his knowledge.

"Your detention has been unjust, young gentlemen," said he, reluctantly. "Of course, I now see that the men who made the charge against you were the ones who should have been arrested. But there's no mending that now. Let me advise you to get out of this neighborhood as fast as possible. You're not popular here."

"That is all very well, sir," said Harold, respectfully. "But how about this written and signed confession in our possession?"

The rustic Solon scratched his ear and smiled mysteriously.

"It would be worth more," said he, blandly, "if it didn't mix up the illustrious name of Mr. William Bernard with its charges. As it is, it ain't worth a cent. It is simply everlastingly preposterous! I'd advise you to light your next cigar with it."

"Thank you, but I don't smoke," said Harold, carefully folding up the seemingly despised document, and returning it to his pocket. "But your advice to desert the charming hospitality of Richburg is excellent. Pray, can you inform us as to the next train that connects with Lake Falls?"

The squire started. He had already disclaimed any knowledge of Mr. Bernard's whereabouts.

"What can you want to go to Lake Falls for?" he asked, abruptly.

"Pardon me, sir," said Harold, "but, without meaning any disrespect to you, that is our business, not yours."

The railroad ticket-agent, a shrewd-looking, observant man, and about the only one among the spectators who had treated the young men with any sort of decency, here informed them that the train they should take would not be due till six o'clock the following morning.

At this point Jerry shook himself uneasily, and snatched up Harold's valise and his own, both of which had been carried after them from the tavern as though they were infected.

"Come on, my boy!" he roared, with a grandly contemptuous glance around him that caused the crowd to shrink afresh. "We'll get out of this durned one-horse hole, if we have to foot it all the way to Lake Falls. It can't be more than a few hundred miles, at the furthest."

Badgered and distressed as he had been, Harold could not help smiling.

"But I am about dead for want of sleep," said he, "and so are you."

This was the truth, and, considering their short rest of the preceding night, and their arduous adventures of the past two days, it was little to wonder at.

"That's nothing," said Jerry. "We can burrow in the ground, or hang ourselves on the side of a fence, if need be. Anything is preferable to this thrivin' and Christian-city, as they call it," he guffawed hysterically. "There's too much William Bernard hereabouts to suit me. Come ahead!"

There really seemed nothing better to be done, considering the absolute inhospitality that had been everywhere evinced, so Harold relieved him of the valises, and they started on their dubious pilgrimage.

As they made their way out of the town, the crowd cheered again; exactly why or wherefore was difficult to say, but perhaps it was on general principles in triumphant vindication of the township's dignity, or of the man who seemed to boss and own it, body and soul.

Night had almost fallen. As the young men were walking disconsolately up the railroad track, a pleasant voice hailed them, and they were overtaken by the ticket-agent.

"I'm sorry you've been treated so hoggishly," said he. "But these people don't know how to act otherwise where William Bernard is concerned. I'll show you where you can pass the night, if are not particular as to accommodations."

"Any port in a storm!" cried Jerry, dropping his portmanteau to clasp the ticket-agent in his arms. "You are the only white man in Richburg!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FREIGHT-CAR.

The ticket-agent led them to a siding where an almost brand-new freight-car was standing alone.

"Get in there," said he, "and I will bring you some bedding. I live not far away."

He hurried away and presently returned, not only with blankets and other bedding, but also

with a basket full of an excellently cooked supper, together with a couple of candles to light up the banquet.

In fact, he was almost loaded down with the comforts that he carried, besides being out of breath with the haste he had made.

It took but a few minutes to put the interior of the car, which was perfectly clean, in cosy condition, when the benevolent railroader turned to go, after refusing all offers of remuneration for his kindness.

"Dash it all!" said he, "I'd have taken you right to my house, if I had dared. But my wife is a distant connection of Mr. Bernard; and, if the truth must be told, it's almost as much as any man's life is worth to say or do or hint anything against that man round about here."

"Rather a humiliating truth, though, I should say," observed Harold.

The ticket-agent, who had introduced himself as Mr. Spanner, assented, with something very like a muttered oath under his breath.

"How do you explain it?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly. He owns stock in the road; he manages a lot of real estate as Miss Bernard's guardian; he runs the bank as it suits him since his half-brother's death (ah, gentlemen, there was a man for you!) some years ago; he's the political boss, and, somehow or other, he's got an iron in every fire, and the whole population is more or less under his thumb."

Both Harold and Jerry were at once deeply interested.

"What is your private opinion of this Mr. Bernard?" asked the former.

Before answering, Mr. Spanner looked cautiously about him. Then he seemed fairly to explode.

"My opinion is," he said, "that he is the all-fired, meanest, most absolute hypocrite, liar, villain and general human hyena that ever went unhung, and don't you forget it. A dangerous man!"

"You mention the young lady whose guardian he is," said Harold. "My friend and I are much interested in her, though we are not at liberty to tell you how. What has become of her?"

"Run off somewhere. Couldn't get on in that hound's household, after the wife's death. I only hope she'll keep out of his clutches till her twenty-first birthday—some time next autumn, they tell me. She can make him sweat then, if she chooses."

"Was the young lady liked hereabouts?"

"Liked, sir? She's an angel in petticoats! That's the truth, as any one will tell you."

The questions would have gone on, but that Mr. Spanner began to manifest uneasiness under them.

"I only ask you one thing in return for the little service I have been enabled to do for you," said he, once more getting ready to go.

"Name it."

"That you leave me your names and New York addresses in full when you buy your tickets in the morning. The Company may require them when investigating the two tragedies back yonder on the road."

"You shall have them."

"Good-night, gentlemen. Don't be alarmed at the trains that will rush past between now and daybreak. The Special, that makes no stop between Spuyten Duyvil and Albany, and is due here at five o'clock, is a regular hummer. But the switch is shut, and you are safe on the siding here. You can shut the car doors or leave them open, but I don't think you will be disturbed, as no one else can know of your being here. They can only be fastened on the outside, you know. Good-night again!"

He jumped out of the car, and was gone.

They had already lifted the candles, and now proceeded to the enjoyment of their repast, which was both substantial and appetizing.

To do this they had to seat themselves on their portmanteaus, but the occasion was none the less gratifying.

"That man," said Jerry, with his mouth full of cold chicken, "is a he-seraph in blue cloth and gilt buttons, old fellow, and no mistake."

"But almost any Christian conduct would seem divine in this God-deserted region," said Harold, filling a couple of cups with some aromatic cold tea. "Such is the blessed force of contrast. But, don't you know, railroad-men mostly are good fellows?"

"I've noticed that," said Jerry. "How do you account for it?"

"Humanizing effects of constantly knocking about, being always on the go, I fancy. The rolling stone may gather no moss, as they say, Jerry, but that is just the beauty of rolling."

"How so?"

"Because friction, and the roundness and polish that come of it, are better than the moss of indolence and stagnation."

Jerry's blue eyes sparkled appreciatively, though he was now discussing a particularly nice jam-tart, with the cool tea to wash it down.

"I never heard that before," said he, "but it is devilish good just the same. By Jupiter, Mr. Harold! I wish I was as smart as you."

"Don't underrate yourself," said Harold, modestly. "You're as clever and effective in

your big, sterling way as any man I ever met."

One side of the car was already closed and locked. Before retiring, they partly closed the door on the other side.

Jerry was the last to get into the improvised bed, and he blew out the lights.

"I've slept in odd places in my time," said he, as he stretched himself beside his companion with a gratified yawn. "Yes, in odd places, from the cubby-hole of an oyster-sloop to the shady end of a beer-garden, but this is the first time I ever bunked in a freight-car."

"Me, too," said Harold, sleepily. "But if we were professional tramps, we could hardly say that it would be the last."

Just then a long coal-train began to roll past. They could feel the jolts of the heavy trucks communicated to the siding, but were too tired out to care for them, and were soon fast asleep.

Harold was awakened in the middle of the night by a cold wind blowing on his face.

Sitting up, he became aware that the car-door was slid further back than Jerry had adjusted it.

Then he became suspicious that an intruder was in the car.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he even distinguished the outlines of a man, apparently engaged in searching his coat and waistcoat, which were hanging on a hook just over the foot of the mattress.

Jerry was sleeping peacefully on his back and snoring like a sea-cow.

Harold reached under his improvised pillow for the revolver he had placed there before lying down.

The robber had been before him.

It was gone.

Nothing daunted, he began to rise stealthily, with the intention of pouncing on the intruder and taking him completely by surprise.

But in doing so he unfortunately treated his bed-mate to a sharp dig in the ribs with his elbow.

Jerry stirred, switched off from his snore, grunted, and then, probably breaking loose from a nightmare, bellowed out like a tortured ox.

The shadowy figure took the alarm and flitted for the opening.

But before he could reach it the Hurricane Detective was upon him with a tempestuous bound.

The fellow was powerful and showed fight.

There was a grapple, and they rolled over and over upon the dusty floor.

At the same instant Jerry staggered to his feet with a rather muddled appreciation of what was going on, being still heavy with sleep, and the head and shoulders of a fresh intruder darkened the opening.

There was a flash and a report.

Harold, who was on top of his adversary, rolled off, momentarily stunned by the wind of an ounce-bullet that grazed his ear.

His opponent seized the opportunity to disappear.

Pursuit was useless, as the detectives were but half-dressed and in their stocking feet, while the footfalls of the fugitives could be heard flying down the line of the railroad.

Jerry had by this time struck a light, and Harold was again on his feet.

"Tramps, I reckon!" said Jerry. "But look here." And he scratched his head. "Odd tramps at that!"

"How so?" said Harold, who was feeling of his barked ear.

Jerry pointed to some loose money, which had apparently been laid carelessly to one side as not worth taking.

"Why, they've even disdained your money!" said he. "Queer sort of tramps, eh?"

Harold seized the garment and began to search the coat in particular with special eagerness.

"Worse than tramps!" he exclaimed.

"What is the matter?"

"The confession—it is gone! We're outwitted. That is the treasure they were after, and they have got it!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

It was but too true.

The signed and witnessed confession was gone, and it was sufficiently evident that the precious pair, Yager and Mallock, or some other miscreant hirelings of Mr. Bernard's had taken it.

Jerry began to swear, while he examined the door.

"What time is it?" he asked.

Harold consulted his watch.

"Half-past twelve."

"I wish there was some way of fastening this blamed door on the inside," growled Jerry. "How can we lie down in any security now, and there's five good hours to finish off our sleep in."

"It can't be helped," said Harold, with a sigh. "Slide the door to as close as you can, and we'll make the best of it. I am almost as sleepy as in the start."

At the same time he picked up his missing revolver, which had been bestowed along with the money and pocketbook.

"That is lucky," said he.

He again thrust the weapon under his rude pillow, and once more sought a recumbent attitude.

This put Jerry in mind of his own pistol, which was found to have also been abstracted from under his head, and deposited in an obscure corner.

"It's a wonder we were not robbed of the shirts on our backs," said he. "We must have slept like logs."

The light was again extinguished, and they once more addressed themselves to slumber.

When they next awoke the early morning light was creeping in through the chinks of the car.

It was twenty minutes to five o'clock.

"We might as well turn out," said Harold. "Thank the Lord for a good, long night's rest, anyway, in spite of the interruption."

"Right you are," said Jerry, stretching himself. "But what's up? Isn't the car moving?"

They both sat up.

"I believe you're right," said Harold. "You're nearest the door; open it and see if we're deceived or not."

Jerry sprang to his feet with a jump that shook everything like an earthquake.

"It's locked!" he yelled, instantly, upon grasping the door. "Locked on the outside!"

Harold joined him in haste.

It was true!

The door had been secured on the outside during their second sleep.

While Jerry began to swear, after a reprehensible habit of his when suddenly perplexed or excited, Harold gritted his teeth and clinched his hands.

"The scoundrels! the deep, calculating, cunning cowards!" he ejaculated. "Sleeping or waking, must we forever be the victims of their conspiring plots and treacheries? Oh, if we could but—"

He was interrupted by a sudden jolt that almost threw him down, while Jerry was sent staggering.

That the car was moving could no longer be doubted.

Its motion, however, was for the most part so slow and smooth as to be hardly perceptible.

The exceptional jolt had probably been caused by a stone or some other obstacle on one of the rails.

"This is still more mysterious," exclaimed Harold, looking about him as well as he was able, for but little daylight managed to filter into that close-shut interior. "Aren't those ventilation slats up yonder?"

He pointed to some narrow sort of blinds high up from the floor at the forward end.

"Yes," said Jerry.

Reaching up, he managed to unclose the slats, but, the car being an exceptionally high-roofed one, he was not near tall enough to peep through them.

But he could "boost" Harold up so that the latter could look out, and this he accordingly did.

"Some one must be pushing us from behind," called out Harold. "The coast is clear ahead here."

"Are we really moving?" demanded Jerry.

"Yes, plainly enough, though very slowly. But it's a long siding. At this rate we ought to be on the main track in about fifteen minutes."

Jerry staggered as if he had been stabbed.

His terrified response caused Harold to drop from his uneasy position with something of his own alarm.

"Good God! that will throw us right across the path of the five-o'clock Special, that the ticket-agent warned us against."

They stood staring at each other for a moment in mute and powerless amazement.

Could human malignity be capable of the fiendish intention that was feared?

"Perhaps it's the wind!" Harold suddenly burst out. "I noticed by the way the trees were waving that a high wind was prevailing. Hark! one can hear it whistling."

Jerry rose to the hope like a trout to a fly.

"That's it, depend on it!" he exclaimed.

"Let's pray that it is, anyway."

"There are some more slats at the other end!" cried Harold. "Quick! boost me up to them."

This was done.

The moment Harold peered through the rear slats, his heart died within him.

It was not to the wind, but to a far more intelligent, if more inhuman, agency that they were indebted for the fatal motion of the car.

Two men were pushing it, under the direction of a third.

It was rather laborious work, for the siding was connected with the main line by a slightly-rising grade.

But they were persistent, and slowly, but surely, they were succeeding in their monstrous object; which was plainly to lay the wheeled prison directly in the iron pathway of the five-o'clock Special, and thus accomplish the violent death of its luckless inmates.

The two men pushing the car were John Yager and Patrick Mallock.

The man directing them was—William Bernard!

Harold instantly recognized him, notwithstanding the rough garb and false whiskers by which he was disguised.

Harold retained his self-control by a great effort.

Slipping down from his uncomfortable position, he acquainted Jerry with the facts.

Both then hurriedly dressed themselves, and Harold drew his revolver, while Jerry arched his broad back, in order to afford him a steadier foothold while again looking out upon the scoundrels.

"I'll appeal to their sense of humanity first, that is, if they have any," said Harold, as he again mounted to a level with the ventilator. "If the appeal fails, I shall shoot them down without mercy. It will be in pure self-defense—the law cannot but justify me."

"Good!" said Jerry.

"Mr. Bernard, your disguise is useless—I recognize you!" called out Harold, as soon as he again had the infamous trio in view. "I call upon you to instantly give over this murderous attempt against my friend and myself."

Mr. Bernard looked up with a slight start, while the men pushing the car only laughed, without discontinuing their work.

At first he seemed disposed to deny his identity. Then he laughed, too, besides shrugging his shoulders.

"Ten minutes hence, it will make no difference, one way or the other," said he. "Push away, you fellows! We must have her on the main line, as I told you, before the first whistle of the five-o'clock Special reaches our ears."

The cold-blooded indifference of the words maddened Harold.

"I have you covered with my revolver, and I am a dead shot," he called out. "As Heaven is my witness, if you do not instantly order this infamous work stopped, I shall endeavor to take your life!"

To his astonishment, the menace had no more effect than the appeal.

Mr. Bernard merely looked up again, this time with a sardonic smile.

Harold took deliberate aim at his heart, and pulled the trigger.

There was no flash, no report; the hammer rose and fell successively on the five remaining chambers with no better effect; the weapon was emptied.

Flinging it away with a groan, he called for Jerry's shooter.

The latter managed to pass it up to him, but this also was found to be empty.

Mr. Bernard was quite merry now, while his satellites were no less amused.

The car was still moving, slowly, surely, inevitably.

At this moment, from miles and miles away, there came a faint sound.

But a terrible, a significant, a fatal sound!

It was the first whistle of the five-o'clock Special!

CHAPTER XXV.

BY A HAIR'S-BREADTH.

"HA, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Bernard. "The Special may be a little over-prom-t to-day, but we'll be on time to meet it, Mr. Harcourt. Never fear as to that, my dear sir. By the way, when I separated from our dear little friend, Marion Bernard, yesterday afternoon, she was looking most charming. Perhaps she would have sent her love, had she known of my meeting you. As it is, *bon voyage*, my dear Mr. Harcourt, for the next world—for eternity. It saddens me to have you go, but the best of friends must part. Bestir yourselves, you rascals! Are you men or snails?"

But his subordinates were so convulsed with laughter over his jocular mood as to be for the moment incapacitated for further effort.

They speedily resumed their pushing, however, and, as Mr. Bernard now condescended to apply his own broad shoulder to one side of the car, its movement was considerably accelerated.

Harold once more jumped down from his perch.

He was very pale, but calm.

"Quick!" said he, as Jerry straightened his back. "We might have guessed that the revolvers had been tampered with. But we have more cartridges. Our only hope is in reloading them in time to kill our would-be murderers."

The weapons were quickly recharged.

Then Harold again sprang up to the ventilator, with one in either hand.

A fresh glance outside dispelled his last remaining hope.

The car continued to move, but the men who propelled it were no longer visible.

They had shrewdly surmised the reloading of the pistols, and were now pushing at the sides of the car, entirely out of sight and range.

Again Harold jumped down, this time with a story of despair.

"We can but die like men," said he, with horrible fortitude. "A space of fifty feet is all that separates us from the main line. At this rate of movement we have perhaps three minutes to live—perhaps two. Hark!"

Another steam-whistle—this time shrill and

distinct—apparently less than three miles away.

If ever an artificial sound was invested with an association of inevitable, irrevocable, absolute doom, it was that one at that instant.

Harold held out his hand.

"Good-by, old fellow!" said he, with an unshaken voice. "It is hard, it is bitter, but it is inevitable."

But Jerry was in no mood for this resigned spirit; he chafed like a lion in the toils.

"Never!" he hoarsely cried, furiously rejecting the proffered farewell. "Even death is not inevitable while the slightest film of division stands between it and the life we revel in!"

Brave Jerry! the emergency made him even poetical, no less than grand.

"Quick! the other door," he cried. "We have never yet tested that one's fastenings thoroughly."

Harold regretted his resignation as something unworthy of him.

Together they sprang upon the door, striving like maniacs to slide it back.

They succeeded in budging it so far that the heavy padlock and staple that secured it could be seen through a small crack.

"The pistols!" roared Jerry. "You understand!"

Harold did understand.

Instantly he began emptying the revolver into the staple and padlock like a madman.

Jerry in the mean time kept straining on the door with his giant strength.

Another whistle—this time a perfect shriek—and accompanied by the hiss of the iron horse, the rushing rumble of the thundering train.

"Shoot away!" yelled Jerry; "she's beginning to give."

The fastenings snapped and the door flew open.

Out went men and portmanteaus as if dumped from a cornucopia, gaining the further side of the main track which the car had been pushed upon the moment before.

Simultaneously there came a rush, roar, wrath, ruin, and destruction.

The obstructing car was dashed into kindling-wood and the battered steed of iron sped on with a sort of angry moan, the linked vertebra that was its tail following.

Dense woods were on either side of the track.

Into one of these the infamous Mr. Bernard and his hireling miscreants had disappeared, whether with or without a knowledge of their intended victims' escape there was no means of telling.

"Quick!" cried Harold, leading the way into the opposite wood. "The engine was hopelessly damaged, and there will be an inquiry. We mustn't be caught here, or we may be hopelessly detained."

Jerry followed obediently.

"Good Lord!" said he, "I'm dripping wet. The sweat is still pouring from me in streams."

"Me, too," said Harold. "It's a wonder our hair is not turned white."

When they had halted in the center of a little dense copse not far away, Harold produced his note-book and pencil.

He wrote rapidly, though with a trembling hand.

It was a brief report of the peril that had been passed. He read it aloud to Jerry when he had finished, then enveloped, addressed and stamped what he had written.

"It is for ticket-agent Spanner," said he, exhibiting the address "Come along, old fellow."

He now led the way through the wood on a line parallel with the railroad.

Jerry insisted on shouldering both portmanteaus.

"I'm feeling all right now," said he, cheerfully. "Holy smoke! what an escape that was. Whither away now, Mr. Harold?"

"For the next station ahead, where we can post this letter, and take our Lake Falls train. I hope we can be there by six o'clock, the stations are so close together on this road."

"Good enough! And then?"

"Then, leaving all inquiries behind us, hey for Lake Falls! Perhaps we can even get there before Bernard."

Jerry gnashed his teeth, and clutched the portmanteaus with a tighter grip.

"Oh, to have a fair show at that fiend incarnate and his demon crew!" he muttered. "I feel that I could slaughter a whole raft of 'em, and with one hand tied behind my back."

"Be of good heart," said Harold, hopefully. "The time of right and justice will come. It always does, sooner or later."

They reached the station, which was called Edgewood, with five minutes to spare.

News of the "accident," the ticket-agent informed them, had already been telegraphed along the line, but the Special had kept on, though in a somewhat crippled condition, and the track behind was fortunately still clear.

The letter was posted, and our detectives once more on their way.

Theirs was a slow train, making many stoppages, but toward noon they made the last halt before reaching their destination.

"Here's a sort of eating ranch," said Jerry,

glancing out as the train slowed up. "Let's get a bite, if it's only a doughnut. I could eat a quarter of beef."

Harold assented, for he, too, was feeling faint and hungry.

As they snatched up some articles of food from the lunch-counter, three men, who had also alighted unperceived by them, suddenly whirled past the restaurant window behind two superb-looking horses.

Followed by Harold, Jerry made a jump for the station platform, with a doughnut in his mouth and another in his fist.

"Great Scott!" he managed to exclaim; "did you catch on to 'em?"

Harold nodded.

Both had recognized the disappearing trio as Bernard and his brace of wretches at the same instant.

"Are you acquainted with those men who just drove away behind the spanking bays?" Harold asked of the conductor, as they again boarded the train.

The conductor shook his head.

"I ask," continued Harold, "because I have reasons for thinking that they had tickets for Lake Falls."

"So they had. They got aboard at Richburg."

"Ah! I can't imagine, then, why they should take horses now."

"I can—that is, if they're in a particular hurry."

"Why?"

"Because they will be able to reach Lake Falls ahead of us."

"Ahead of the train?"

"Yes."

"You surprise me."

"It is not surprising, though. They have a straight-away road before them, while the iron track makes three curves—almost a letter S—between this and Lake Falls, besides having to stop midway ten minutes for the passing of the down-Express. Single track, you understand. Moreover, those chaps must have telegraphed for that team. At all events, one of 'em entered the telegraph office at the next station this side of Edgewood."

He passed on, leaving the detective in a fresh consternation.

"What do you think?" whispered Harold. "Of course those scoundrels are meditating some new crime—perhaps even to wrecking us between here and Lake Falls."

"I believe you."

"Shall we warn the conductor by telling him of our last adventure?"

"By all means."

"All right."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"VILLAINY SOMEWHERE!—WHOSE?"

ACCORDINGLY, when the conductor next came along, he was taken into confidence.

He stared when made acquainted with the incident of the freight-car, together with the consequent suspicions of fresh peril in prospect.

Then he gave a short laugh.

"You tempt me to believe that you are both off your base," said he. "Of course, I've heard of the smashing of the freighter; every trainman on the line knows of it by this time. But that you gentlemen were locked up in her at the critical moment—come, now; you are presuming on my credulity."

"Before Heaven, I am not!" exclaimed Harold, earnestly, and he went into further particulars, even telling of the report he had sent to Ticket-agent Spanner.

"It's a tremendous story," said the conductor. "Of course, I take your word for it, you are so earnest and circumstantial. But what have I to do with it?"

"Nothing with that matter. We can only hope that the miscreants will ultimately be brought to justice. But how about the danger ahead?"

"What danger ahead?"

"Why, don't you comprehend that those same scoundrels are the ones who drove off behind the bays?"

"I do comprehend—that you think so."

"Thank you. May they not intercept us between here and Lake Falls?"

"Yes, they may; but what for, since we make no intermediate stop, except as we are doing at this moment, to let the down train slip by."

"What for?" echoed Harold. "Why, perhaps for the purpose of wrecking this train!"

The conductor shook his head.

"There are too many perhappes in railroad-ing," said he. "We could never take 'em into serious account; life is too short."

"But the danger I apprehend is wholly a logical one. The crowning desire of these scoundrels is to accomplish the destruction of my companion and myself. Foiled in one attempt, they will not hesitate at a fresh one."

"What! to the extent of destroying all the innocent passengers on this train?"

"Undoubtedly, if they can't accomplish our death in any other way. A whole hecatomb of innocent lives wouldn't deter them."

The conductor laughed again.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, benevolently. "I

don't mean to offend you, but your impression of your own paramount importance strikes me none the less as an overweening one."

He remained deaf to everything else that was said, and passed on, after signaling the train to proceed, the down-Express that had been waited for having at that moment rushed by.

Harold was almost in despair.

"What can be done when men in authority are so incredulous?" he groaned.

"Let us take our chances," said Jerry. "That pig-headed chap can't say that he wasn't warned, anyway."

"But the lives of all our fellow-passengers are meanwhile at stake," said Harold. "Look at the wild country surrounding us, and the terrible rate of speed we have already attained. Why, if deviltry is attempted—"

He never finished the sentence.

At that instant the fore-feared catastrophe occurred.

A shock, a crash, the splintering of iron, wood and glass as the doomed cars were smashed, broken or telescoped, and then the debris of the crime-wrought wreck strewn the side of an embankment, down which the train had been hurled, like a bruised and broked dragon, writhing, twisting and helpless beneath a conquering heel.

But the conqueror, the destroyer, was invisible even then.

A rail had been cunningly displaced (by whom, or was it by chance?) the ruin was complete, and the agent or agents of the deed was nowhere.

Then, the shrieks of the injured, the stillness of the slain, the writhings of the mutilated—the baggage-van on fire—one car broken in two, another on its side, the remainder telescoped—the engine on its back, with its wheels in the air, like a mammoth insect overthrown—the misery, the panic, the despair.

Harold and Jerry were among the handful of wholly uninjured.

When the former came to his senses after the shock, he was in the arms of the faithful fellow, who had torn him out of the wreck, while springing out and shaking himself free of the splinters:

"As a dog that shakes his ears

When he leaps from the water to the land!"

In a few moments they were busying themselves, with the rest of the uninjured, in looking after the wounded and dying.

This task was being directed by the engineer, a capital official, while his assistant and the brakeman were extinguishing the fire.

"Where is the conductor?" asked Harold.

"Haven't seen him since the smash," replied the engineer. "He has doubtless run on ahead to carry the news."

No, he had not.

At that moment they came upon him, or rather what was left of him.

Both legs were hopelessly crushed under a portion of the overturned "smoker," and his breast-bone was caved in.

The pallor of fast-approaching dissolution was overspreading his features, but he was still conscious.

He feebly beckoned Harold and Jerry to approach.

"You were right, and I was wrong," he gasped. "But justice may yet be done—forgive!—make your story public—the Company—"

That was all; he was dead.

The catastrophe had occurred in a wild and desolate spot, surrounded by high, wooded hills, notwithstanding that the engineer said it was but a short mile and a half from the Lake Falls station.

To add to the horror and discomfort of it all it began to rain heavily.

"There is a deserted farm-house back yonder in the mountain a short distance," said the engineer, "to which I have ordered the baggage to be carried. As it will still be some time before medical attendance can reach us from the village, some of the worst cases of the wounded might be put under shelter there, too, if you gentlemen will kindly superintend the job."

This was addressed to the detectives, who at once expressed their compliance provided the deserted house was pointed out to them.

"Yon fellow will point you the way," said the engineer, indicating a brakeman who was entering the wood with a crippled child on one arm and a bursted mail-bag under the other. "Here, Jim," he called out, "show these gentlemen the way to the Haunted House, and they'll make things lively."

Harold and Jerry carefully took up between them a wounded man whom they had been ministering to and followed into the wood.

The house was less than a quarter of a mile distant, but the path approaching it was so overgrown, apparently by the neglect of many years, as to be well-nigh impenetrable.

Indeed, one of the trainmen was already at work clearing it, ax in hand, though the porch of the old house when reached at last was even now piled with baggage, among which the detectives recognized their own portmanteaus, while make-shift accommodations for the wounded had been arranged in one of the interior rooms.

Nothing could exceed the forlornness of the house, evidently at one time in the remote past a residence of no small pretensions.

It might have been built long anterior to the Revolution, front and sides being open to wind and weather in a hundred places, though the mossy, red-tiled roof was comparatively perfect, while the once stately garden, and even the deserted high-road adjoining had reverted to the original forest.

The brakeman, who had noticed the young men's curious looks, spoke as they came to a tired pause near what had been the garden-fence on their way back to the scene of disaster.

"I was born and bred in these parts," said he. "That old house was as old, shunned and dreaded, apparently, as it is now when my parents and even my grandparents were children."

"Has it always had the reputation of being haunted?" asked Harold.

"Yes; and also of being the uncanny fastness of counterfeiters, smugglers, thieves and murderers. But a fine old estate it must have been in its time, too."

"Whom does it belong to?"

"To the same family that's always owned it, though they've little property remaining in these parts now—the Bernards."

The detectives started, and exchanged a quick glance, as much as to say:

"Is it fatality? Are we to be forever immeshed, beyond extrication, amid the associations of that deadly name?"

The man further informed them that the family owning the estate was the same of which Mr. William Bernard was the executor, in behalf of the sole heir thereto, Miss Marion Bernard.

He then went on, while Harold and Jerry loitered behind to discuss the new complication, halting for this purpose at a small spring that bubbled from under the roots of a tree hard by the lonely and tangled path.

"It must be," said Harold, "that our arch-enemy is still not far distant."

"We can safely bet on that," said Jerry, gloomily. "However, what are we here for but to circumvent him, and rescue the young lady?"

At this instant both he and Harold were sent staggering by terrific blows delivered from behind.

The blows were repeated with lightning-like rapidity, and they fell senseless.

They recovered to find themselves bound and helpless in a different part of the wood, with lowering and mocking faces around them.

They were once more at the mercy of their enemy, Mr. Bernard.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE ENEMY'S CLUTCH.

MR. BERNARD was, however, not present in person among the ruffianly gang.

One man, who was busy investigating the contents of the victims' pockets, which he had previously turned inside out, was recognized by them as old Guernsey.

They presently made out two more of them as the miscreants Yager and Mallock, while all the rest appeared to be strangers.

But the detectives had been badly stunned by the dastard blows they had received, and were not in condition to make critical observations.

Old Guernsey, with a grunt of satisfaction, selected the two baggage checks from the miscellaneous plunder he had been overhauling, and swept the residue into his capacious pockets.

He tossed the checks to Yager.

"Get the baggage called for by those," he growled. "You will probably find them piled up at the Haunted House."

The man hesitated.

"Perhaps they won't give them to me on these," said he.

Guernsey grew furious.

"Fool!" he roared; "you are instructed to obtain them. See that you do it, by fair means or foul."

Then as Yager submissively vanished, the veteran ruffian turned to his companions.

"Those chaps seem to be all right now," said he, with a malevolent glance at the prisoners. "See if they can walk. If not, hustle or drag 'em along any way. We must be getting back to the road."

The prisoners submitted to being forced upon their feet and hurried along through the forest, notwithstanding that they were aching in every bone.

But they submitted in different ways, Harold being uncomplaining and observant, and Jerry just the reverse.

Or rather, the latter accepted his fresh misfortune with such ironical resignation as is the characteristic of a rearing, plunging mad bull plugged with banderillos, pinked with spear-points, and in the face of a score or so of flaunting red rags.

"Scum of the earth! we'll yet be even with you!" he thundered. "It isn't alone Harold Harcourt, the Hurricane Detective, but also Jerry Cleaver, the athlete Terror of the Harlem, that you have in the toils. Curse you all!

how many do you muster, anyway? I can only count eight, but that will do. Set but one of my hands free, and I'll bargain to lick the whole gang of you in three minutes by the watch, or eat my shirt!"

A chorus of taunts and jeers was his response, though old Guernsey, who was leading the procession, did not so much as turn his head.

Once Jerry even burst away from his immediate captors, and, solely by the use of his legs and feet, succeeded in making such havoc among them that several were placed *hors du combat*, and it was some little time before he was reduced to submission.

Harold, in a low voice, reproved him for his outbreaks, and Jerry finally promised to cultivate a more philosophic spirit.

But throughout every interruption old Guernsey paid hardly any attention.

Indeed, this hard, sardonic, smileless, and for the most part silent old man gradually assumed mysterious characteristics to the prisoners; and it was, moreover, evident that he exercised an influence over the desperadoes surrounding him scarcely second to that of Mr. Bernard.

At last, after half an hour's toilsome but steady march through the unbroken road, they came out upon a narrow, unfrequented road, where a wagon and team were standing that the detectives instantly recognized as the one in which Mr. Bernard and his two minions had driven away shortly prior to the railway accident.

Yager held the reins, and in the wagon were the prisoners' portmanteaus.

At a sign from Guernsey, the detectives were assisted into the wagon by Mallock, who took a seat facing them, holding across his knees a double-barreled shot-gun that he had been carrying from the first.

It should have been mentioned that all the outlaws were apparently armed, some of them with revolvers and others with weapons in sight, others not.

Then Guernsey climbed to the seat beside the driver.

Before he gave the order to whip up, the following colloquy occurred between him and a tall, authoritative-looking young man with one eye, whom he occasionally addressed as Jabez or Jabe:

GUERNSEY. Where did the boss send you word to meet him with the band?

JABEZ. At the Burnt Tree.

G. At what hour?

J. Three this afternoon.

G. It is nearly that now.

J. What are you keeping me for, then?

G. For final instructions.

J. What are they?

G. First answer this: Where are the rest of the band?

J. (with an oath). Plundering the dead men at the smash-up.

G. Get them together, and keep your appointment with the boss at the Burnt Tree.

J. What am I to tell him?

G. That the prisoners will be held for his pleasure in the Cavern of Skulls.

J. (going). Said and done.

G. Wait! Who is the boss likely to have with him?

J. How should I know? Indian Dickey, I suppose.

G. He might send me word in advance by the boy, if he is unavoidably detained. Tell him I said so.

J. Said and done.

That was all.

Guernsey touched the driver's elbow, and the horses were started at a free pace.

Both Harold and Jerry had listened to the foregoing colloquy with such interest and anxiety as can well be imagined, but without betraying the one or the other by the slightest change of countenance.

Presently they overheard Guernsey and Yager exchange some words in a very low tone, evidently with no intention of being overheard.

"Why did you speak so openly with Jabe, sir?" asked the latter.

"I had nothing to conceal," was the reply.

"Is it nothing that these prisoners should overhear you?"

"Nothing."

"Are you not afraid of their knowing too much?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because they will be dead before to-morrow's sunrise."

The road that was being traversed seemed to belong to a past era.

Growing grass and weeds almost wholly obliterated its track in many places, and for long, uninterrupted stretches.

The occasional houses that were passed were log cabins, and they in a state of desertion and decay.

Wild animals—rabbits, foxes, squirrels, partridges, and once a beautiful red deer—were frequently seen, often springing across the track, fearless and undismayed.

Wild mountain crests and gorges rose on every hand.

But presently, after about an hour's rapid

driving, a high ridge was surmounted, and then a magnificent view burst upon their sight.

Far below and beyond stretched a glorious watery expanse—the romantic expanse of Lake George.

Mountains embosomed it, wooded islands sparkled like rough emeralds amid the rich sapphire setting of its limpid waves, and a beautiful little town—probably the village of Lake Falls—nestled on its gleaming beach at the foot of the ridge.

Every one, even including Yager and Mallock, seemed to be impressed by the picturesque beauty of the scene, with the single exception of old Guernsey.

He even gave a pettish exclamation, either because he was generally tired out, or because he was positively annoyed by the natural loveliness that the others found entrancing.

"Take the short cut, and hurry on," said he. Then he hopped over into the back of the wagon, as if suddenly reminded of a satisfactory treat too long deferred.

Drawing his knife, he cut open the prisoners' portmanteaus at the sides, and proceeded to tear out and paw over their contents with the naïve delight of a child with some new toys, or of a kitten in a forbidden garret.

But, as the valises had for the most part, contained nothing but old clothes, he soon wearied of the inspection.

Tossing the articles together in an indiscriminate heap, he looked contemptuously at their helpless owners, as much as to say:

"Really, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves! If I couldn't travel with a better outfit than that, I would cut my throat, by way of a change!"—and hopped back into his seat.

Jerry's swollen hands worked convulsively, as if itching to be at the spoiler's throat; but Harold, ever more philosophical, smiled meditatively.

"The elder Guernsey is worth studying," thought he. "There is an eccentric originality in his hoggishness that is worth an analysis."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CAVERN OF SKULLS.

IN the mean time, they had left the view of the village far behind, and were climbing a rugged, scarcely perceptible mountain wheel-track between mighty trees.

Presently they came to a pause before the mouth of a cave that opened upon a broad, breezy plateau-like shelf in the side of the mountain, which, in its turn, overlooked, from a great and sheerly perpendicular height, the sparkling waters of the lake as far as the eye could reach.

"Here we are at last," growled old Guernsey, and the wagon was quickly deserted.

Two men sat before the cave, rifles in hand, pistols in belt.

At a sign from Guernsey, these men, assisted by Mallock, ranged the prisoners before them, with their faces toward the cavern entrance.

Then he severed their bonds with a few slashing strokes of his sharp knife.

Agreeably surprised, they turned, but only to confront the old man's sternly-pointing hand and the muzzles of the cocked firearms leveled at their breasts.

"Don't look around again," said Guernsey, "and obey orders promptly or you are dead men."

There was nothing for it but to obey.

"The object is not to torture you unnecessarily," he went on, with a studied inflection on the word. "Forward, march!"

Again they obeyed, straight into the cave, the footfalls of their captors keeping time in the hollowness of the vast, gloomy arched space.

It soon grew perfectly dark, but the floor was without inequalities beneath their enforced forward tread.

"Left wheel!" was the next command.

They made the turn, and were presently brought up with a sharp "Halt!" in a narrow passage lighted by an iron lamp swinging from overhead.

Here a door in the rocky wall was opened and they were thrust into a large, vaulted chamber, or rock-hewn cell, tolerably well-lighted by a rough, iron-barred aperture high up on one side.

Their belongings, including their mutilated portmanteaus, were thrown in after them, and the huge door was shut and bolted behind them, and they were left to their own reflections.

For a moment the immured and unbound stood gazing mutely and questioningly at each other.

Then they did heartily what they had not been able to do for what had seemed to be a vast period—they shook hands.

Then, as Harold worked his stiffening arms and wrists, Jerry raised those members pertaining to himself aloft, and burst into repeated and thunderous roars of laughter.

There might have been an element of hysteria in his mirth, but it was a very sturdy and uproarious kind of hysteria for all that.

"What are you laughing at?" cried the astonished Harold. "Are you waxing daft?"

"No, my friend," responded the giant, easing

up at last; "not daft, but free, unbound, untrammelled!" he again shook his massive arms aloft. "Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! And only let me see the man or men that can put the degrading bonds upon me again."

Harold smiled encouragingly.

"An excellent spirit to cultivate, at all events," said he. "How is your head feeling now?"

"Not so bad as at first."

"Mine, too. We must have been floored by sand-clubs there at the spring. But take a look around you."

Jerry did so.

The rock-hewn apartment, which was provided with a bed and some few rough articles of furniture, was also lined around the walls with human skulls.

There were rows, piles and stacks of them, till, on two sides at least, the walls were completely hidden by them.

"Not very cheerful, eh?"

Jerry scratched his head—his usual resource in cases of perplexity.

"No, not very," he answered. "But then, I think we can stand it."

Harold laughed.

"Come," said he, pointing to the grated opening. "Let us take a look out of doors."

This they were enabled to do, notwithstanding the height of the opening, by the rough unevenness of the walls, which permitted them to climb up with comparative ease.

The opening proved to be in the face of the cliff, looking out over the lake at an immense height.

Jerry tested one of the bars.

It would have proved immovable under fifty times the giant strength that even he could exert.

Descending to the floor, they for the first time noticed a narrow door, set in the rock directly under the window.

It was securely fastened.

Stepping back, they stumbled over a large iron ring set in the floor.

"It is attached to a broad flat rock, apparently hollow," said Harold, examining the new discovery. "Here, Jerry, try your strength here."

Jerry grasped the ring, and tugged his best, but without effect.

Suddenly, however, as though by an accidental twist of his wrist, the entire rock, to which the ring was fastened, moved aside, as if on a pivot.

A square opening, leading into the blackness of unknown depths, was disclosed.

The head of a broken rope-ladder, fastened to the side of the hole, dangled raggedly a few feet down.

Far below was heard a sound like the dashing of waves.

"Not very cheerful, either!" said Jerry, replacing the stone cover by another turn of the wrist. "What manner of place have we got into?"

"Can't you guess?" said Harold.

"Not I; can you?"

"Yes."

"What, then?"

"An old-time smugglers' resort, or rather stronghold."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. The discoveries we have made tend to confirm the impression. Smuggling is still carried on from Canada along the line of the two lakes, and many years ago was much more prevalent."

"But what would they have smuggled all these skulls for? Oh, yes; for drinking-cups, I fancy."

"Don't be sarcastic, old fellow."

"But really, though, Mr. Harold, how about the skulls?"

"The smugglers must have found the cave ready-furnished to their hands. The Tonawanda and Tuscarora Indians, I have heard, were accustomed to treasure up the skulls of their slain enemies in this way."

"Oho!"

"Yes; the cave was doubtless originally used for this purpose. Perhaps it was a relic of the old French and Indian War. The smugglers could have come afterward, you know."

"And after them Mr. Bernard and his present cut-throats?"

"Exactly."

It subsequently proved that Harold was perfectly correct in his impressions.

Presently, when they judged that the sun must be near his setting, a wicket in the entrance door was suddenly thrown open.

Food and drink were thrust in to them, together with a lot of pine-knots and matches, to be used, they were gruffly informed, for illuminating purposes at their pleasure.

The food was simple, but appetizing, and was enjoyed with a relish.

The drink was an excellent article of hard cider, and was no less appreciated.

When twilight had fallen, and Jerry had lighted one of the torches, fastening it up against the wall, whence it afforded a brilliant but somewhat lurid light, the door itself was thrown open.

Then the prisoners were treated to a great surprise.

Yet the person that entered was a perfect stranger to them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

INDIAN DICKEY.

THE intruder was a beautiful Indian, or half-breed, youth, handsome and graceful as a young girl in masculine costume could have been.

And that costume was appropriately picturesque in this instance; the costume, in fact, of the Indian hunter, even to the beaded moccasins, to the bow-and-quiver accompaniment, and to the long knife and tomahawk in the richly-embroidered wampum belt.

"Hallo!" cried Jerry. "Metamora in miniature, eh? Is it a dream, and are we in the Old Bowery Theater once again?"

The young brave laughed, to the charming display of two sparkling rows of teeth; and yet there was a suggestion of intense cruelty in the handsome mouth.

There was, also, a general suggestion of something else to Harold, though he could not for the moment think what it was.

"I'm Indian Dickey," said the boy, with another laugh at their surprise.

"Oh, you are, eh?" said Jerry. "Well, you're the first dickey-bird we've seen hoppin' and chirpin' in this pleasant cage."

Indian Dickey frowned.

"You must be extra-respectful to me," said he. "I shall insist on it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jerry, putting his hands to his sides. "Ho, ho, ho! Hoop me up tight, some one, or I'll split, sure as a gun! By the—"

His unseemly hilarity was interrupted in a most unexpected manner.

There was a lightning-like gesture on the part of the boy, then a flash, and his tomahawk brushed the giant's ear before dashing a shower of splinters from the rocky wall behind him.

"I missed you on purpose," said Indian Dickey, coolly. "Please remember that. But wait!"

There was an equally rapid gesture, or rather series of gestures, which this time brought the bow and arrow into requisition.

The arrow was drawn to a bead and let fly, in fact, with a rapidity that seemed simply incredible.

Jerry's other ear was grazed just as neatly as before, the arrow itself flying into splinters against the wall.

Indian Dickey smiled again, and he recovered his tomahawk with a graceful bound, returning it to his belt.

"I missed you the second time on purpose, too," said he. "Perhaps you don't believe it?"

"Yes, I do," growled the astonished Colossus. "Suppose you give us a rest. Them toys of yours might hurt a feller by accident."

"Toys!"

Harold held out his hand conciliatingly.

"My good friend means no harm, young man," said he, in his gravely engaging manner.

"Come, now, I like you," said Indian Dickey. "But I don't like it that Miss Marion should like you, too, though there's no wonder she does."

Harold was doubly astonished.

The boy accompanied his unexpected words by another of his beautifully cruel smiles, as they might be called.

It was like a revelation.

The vague suggestion was plain enough now. The boy bore a faint but unmistakable family resemblance to Marion Bernard herself.

It was this, together with the unexpected mention of his name, that had caused Harold's two-fold surprise.

"To what are we indebted for your visit?" he asked.

"You'll find out soon enough," said Indian Dickey, shortly. "I must show you the security of your prison. Come!"

He led them lightly across the cell.

"Ah, you have already been looking down Ladder Hole!" said he, with a glance at the iron ring. "Well, you then know of one mode of egress besides the entrance door. There is yet another that you are welcome to avail yourselves of—that is, when you are particularly tired of life. It is here."

He stepped to the narrow door under the grated opening.

A touch of his expert finger caused it to open.

He stepped through it, motioning them to follow, which they did.

They were standing on a small platform of rock less than twenty feet square.

Above, at their backs, soared the face of the cliff, hundreds of feet in the air.

Below, at their feet, it was continued, as many feet down into the lake.

There was just enough twilight remaining to set off the stupendous grandeur and danger of the spot.

"This is the remaining mode of egress," said Indian Dickey, with naïve simplicity. "It's called Osprey Roost. Of course you can avail

yourself of it at any time. Let's go back. I don't like it out here."

They gladly enough complied.

"I am interested in you, my young friend," said Harold, when they were inside the cell again.

"I'm not your friend," said the boy, with a rush of color into his dark cheeks. "That is, not so long as *she* loves you better than me."

"But I am interested in you just the same. Who are you?"

"Indian Dickey."

"But you must have some other name. Your parents—your father—"

"What is that to you? Beware how you anger or shame me. I would kill you."

His black eyes sparkled like basilisks, though the flush had deepened in his face, (was it a flush of shame?) and he half-unsheathed the long dagger in his belt.

"You are unwise to be angry with me," said Harold. "Why are you here?"

"I have told you."

"True, for one thing, to show us the futility of all idea of escape; but for nothing else?"

"Yes; to apprise you that you may look for a visit from my father—from Mr. Bernard in the course of the night."

This was said in a sullen, hard tone.

"For nothing else?"

"Yes; here, take it! May it poison you to death!"

He thrust something into Harold's hand, and disappeared—springing through the entrance, that was at that instant partly opened for his egress, as if in obedience to a secret signal.

That something was a letter.

As Harold's glance fell upon its contents, he gave an exclamation of delight.

The letter was from Marion.

"MY BELOVED HAROLD:—Thank God, you are alive and near me, even though as a hapless captive, like your poor Marion."

"Indian Dickey says that you and Mr. Cleaver are prisoners in the Cave of Skulls, and promises to take this to you from me."

"I am a prisoner in an old house, not far distant, occupied by old Guernsey, where my mother is, I am quite sure, still a captive."

"I now find that I once lived in Lake Falls when a child, and the whole wild region hereabouts is more or less familiar to me, through freshened recollections."

"My imprisonment is strictly guarded, but not otherwise painful, barring my mental agony, chiefly on your precious account."

"Mr. Bernard is not disposed to cruelty toward me. It would seem; but is relentlessly stern at times, mainly because of my ill concealed hatred and terror of him."

"But I shall try to seem more forgiving toward him, for your sake."

"This is to caution you as to how you should conduct yourself in his presence. I know he would gladly, or at least willingly, spare your life, if you should manifest a willingness to give me up, and have the fact of your decision conveyed to me. Otherwise, he will as surely take your life, and speedily."

"Listen to me, my beloved. Temporize with him, even to the extent of seeming to accede to his wish. I will know what value to place upon any report, or apparent proof, of your surrender that he may see fit to convey to me."

"Do this, while trusting to the future, or you are lost!"

"Ah, Heaven! would I advise you to such an hypocritical step, unless I was sure of your love, or if there were any other alternative?"

"I am still hopeful, though more unhappily—perhaps I had better say more *strangely*—situated than you can conceive."

"I think I can trust the Indian boy, but am not sure; for I have reason to believe that he loves me, too; though, of course, he doesn't dare to have Mr. Bernard suspect his passion."

"Do you think he resembles me? If so, the resemblance is wholly accidental."

"I have discovered that Indian Dickey is my guardian's son by his first wife, who was a beautiful Adirondack Indian woman; and Mr. Bernard, as you know, was only my poor father's half-brother."

"I can also now remember that the boy was my sometime playmate when we were little children hereabouts together."

"Adieu, my beloved!"

"For my sake and your own, heed the warning I have given you!"

"Otherwise, I repeat, you are lost; and with you no longer alive, what more for me?"

"Oh, I am so distressed! If I could only solve the mystery of my mother's identity with the secret prisoner of this house, it would relieve me greatly; but that can scarcely be, I fear, without your help."

"My kindest regards to Mr. Jerry—for I feel certain that it must be Mr. Jerry, rather than Mr. Tom."

"God bless you, my darling!"

"Burn this instantly."

"Forever your devoted

"MARION."

Such was the unhappy Marion's unexpected communication.

After reading it a second time, aloud for Jerry's information, Harold hastened to obey its closing injunction by at once reducing it to ashes.

Jerry seated himself on a stool, resting his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands, and knitted his brows in painful thought.

One passage of the letter remained graven indelibly in his mind.

It was this:

"I am more strangely situated than you can conceive. The Indian boy *** loves me, too."

"That would make three of 'em in love with her," thought Jerry. "She never gives a thought of the fourth."

Here the prison-door opened and Mr. Bernard entered.

CHAPTER XXX.

A BUSINESS PROPOSITION.

SHAKING his head, as a roused lion would shake his horrent mane, Jerry sprang to his feet with a sort of gratified roar.

He seemed about to precipitate himself on the intruder and rend him limb from limb, when a tremendous look, so to speak, caused him to remember the caution in Marion's letter.

As he turned to a remote corner of the dungeon with a sort of disappointed growl, Harold, who had himself by this time well in hand, coldly but politely set out a chair for the visitor.

It was accepted without comment.

Save for the rough garb that he still wore, there was no longer an attempt at disguise.

Neither was there in Mr. Bernard's manner or air any of the malicious exultation that might well have been looked for.

On the contrary, he seemed anxious and embarrassed, if not somewhat penitent.

He motioned Harold to be also seated.

"Can you divine the object of my visit?" he then asked, abruptly.

"Let me make a guess," said Harold, with ironical geniality. "It is, doubtless, to decide on the next method of attempting to murder me."

"Nothing of the sort! I do not desire your life, young man."

"Were you equally benevolent in your disposition when you caged my companion and me in the freight-car and pushed us into the jaws of the five o'clock Special?"

"No, I was not. Then, and in every attempt previous thereto, I candidly and earnestly sought your life."

"But not in any subsequent attempt?"

"There has been no subsequent at my instance."

"What?"

"Young man, it is the truth."

"How about yesterday's derailment of the train on which we were—the terrible slaughter that followed?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bernard, meditatively, "that was a terrible accident—a most lamentable one."

"Accident! Do you mean to assert that it was not contrived by you, or by your infernal agency?"

"Good God, Mr. Harcourt! you can't believe me capable of that?"

There was an excellent counterfeit of genuineness in voice and manner, but Harold was unmoved. He made a slight gesture of impatience.

"Why not? After the freight car attempt, is there any diabolism you might not be capable of?"

Mr. Bernard winced.

"Appearances are against me, I own," said he. "But, before heaven, I am guiltless with regard to the hideous catastrophe that followed."

Harold shrugged his shoulders.

"It is Gospel truth, by my hopes of salvation!" continued Mr. Bernard, with renewed vehemence. "But you will see. The investigation cannot but prove that it was the purest of accidents."

Harold waved his hand, as much as to say, "We will let it go at that, for convenience's sake?"

"I am then to understand," said he, "that you have experienced a change of feeling toward me?"

"So far as wishing for your death, yes; that is, on one condition."

"Ah! I suspected the conditional clause would be forthcoming."

"Can you guess its nature?"

"Perhaps so; but I would sooner you would state it."

Mr. Bernard coughed in evident embarrassment, and then said abruptly:

"This is it. I ask you to renounce Marion Bernard's love—throw her over incontinently, you understand?—and give me some proof to carry to her, testifying that you have done so."

Jerry turned in his corner to observe the effect of this insulting demand upon Harold. But the latter was prepared for it, and Jerry was surprised to see him only wince moderately.

There was a long pause, during which Harold seemed to be plunged into a gloomy reverie.

"Why not?" he muttered, as if unconsciously voicing his secret thoughts. "Is the girl worth the danger, worry and expense of it all? Is there not in my another as fair as she?"

Mr. Bernard, with his mouth open like a hungry fish, leaned eagerly forward.

Not a single syllable had escaped him.

Harold came out of his assumed brown study with a start.

"This is a strange demand that you would make of me, Mr. Bernard," said he, knitting his

brows. "Were I not more of a plain business man than a romantic lover, I should be disposed to resent it."

Mr. Bernard rubbed his hands. He even began to beam.

"I like business men," said he. "I have always liked 'em. One can always deal with 'em on the square."

"Thank you, sir," said Harold, looking positively pleased. "Some more explicitness, however, is desirable in your proposition."

"I thought it especially to the point."

"Too one-sided altogether! What, for instance, am I to get in return?"

"Oh! why, that's understood. Your life and liberty, as a matter of course; I shall also promise never to molest you or your friend here again."

Harold made a business-like gesture of disdain.

He might have been cheapening a lot at auction in a burst of commercial diplomacy.

"You're a little out," said he.

"In what way?"

"Haven't my friend and I shown you that we are not afraid to face death?"

"Yes; you are brave men."

"As for our liberty, we are willing to take our chances of recovering that. So what is it, after all, that you offer me for the important—I may say, the paramount—surrender you demand at my hands? Life—liberty. Pshaw! a breath, no more!"

Mr. Bernard's countenance fell a little, but he at once brightened again.

"Business! business!" said he, smiling. "I see you are all that."

"Say, business and money; and what else is there worth living for?"

Mr. Bernard was more thoroughly at his ease than ever.

"Allow me to be a little personal in my remarks," said he.

"Certainly."

"How are you off in the world?"

"Not so well off but that I would gladly have more."

"So; would ten thousand dollars clinch the bargain that we begin to understand so nicely?"

"How you talk! Your marriage with your ward will net you a million."

"No, no, no!"

"Yes, yes, yes! Do you think I did not find everything about her history and fortune before engaging myself to her?"

"Aha! Mr. Harcourt, for a young person, you are a better business man than I gave you credit for."

"Thanks!"—very dryly.

"Let us be frank. What amount will be agreeable to you?"

"I can't say yet."

"Oh, well, then, take your time. A few hours' delay for deliberation is nothing one way or the other."

"Hours! Say, days. Such a proposition is no more to be decided than Rome was built in a day. I shall want at least a week to think it over."

Mr. Bernard's countenance lengthened unmissably.

"That will never do. I couldn't think of waiting so long."

"As you please. Perhaps I shall not even give up the girl at any price. She's a beauty."

"But look here, Harcourt; you surely wouldn't be willing to wait a week in this durned dungeon while making up your mind?"

"No; you would let me out on parole."

"The thunder I would!" cried Bernard, startled out of his diplomacy. "Not by a durned sight!"

Harold laughed.

Then he looked around at the rough walls and sighed.

"Well, make it agreeable for us," said he, in a slow, reluctant tone, "and I'll bide my time here while making up my mind."

Mr. Bernard—certain of ultimate acquiescence in his base proposition, and deeming it only a question of money to be determined—had by this time become somewhat reconciled to the threatened delay.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed, urbanely. "Don't go to bed yet. I'll have the place made so homelike that you won't know it. You may even want to stay here all your lives, which will make me feel sort of 'left.' Ha, ha, ha!"

Here there was a loud knock from without.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CAPTIVITY.

HERETOFORE the entrance of a visitor had been signaled merely by the abrupt opening and closing of the prison door.

But Mr. Bernard had probably arranged for some such sort of a notification in case of an interruption threatening.

He responded to the knock by three loud ones from within, delivered by his heavy walking-stick.

The door opened and the Indian youth entered.

Mr. Bernard was evidently taken by surprise.

"It is you, eh?" he exclaimed, with an oath. "What do you want?"

The youth flushed with equal temper.

"You!" he replied, impudently.

"Me?"

"You're wanted at Guernsey's." And, with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders, he strode back through the still open door.

Jerry looked up furtively.

He was meditating a rush after him when the chance glimmer of two or three rifle-barrels dampened his enthusiasm.

Mr. Bernard turned to Harold.

"A spoiled young *protégé* of mine!" he said, in explanation of the little scene; adding, after a pause: "I will at once attend to your additional comfort here."

Harold bowed.

"In the mean time, you—you will seriously consider my proposition?"

"I shall seriously consider it."

"And you—you will not unnecessarily delay your answer?"

"Not an hour, not a moment, sir."

"Thank you. Good-night, Mr. Harcourt."

He disappeared, the heavy door closing behind him with a hollow clang.

Harold reeled back with an hysterical laugh, and then fell to the floor in convulsions.

Amazed, Jerry sprung to his assistance, taking him up in his vast embrace as if he were a baby.

"In Heaven's name, what is the matter?" he entreated, while sprinkling the young man's pallid brow and frothing lips with water, snatched from a convenient jug. "Speak to me, Mr. Harold! Be you thunder-struck, or pizened?"

The fit was passing. Harold managed to point to a saucer containing salt, that had been brought with the food. Jerry was intelligent, and brought the salt into requisition at once.

The convulsions were conquered. But they had left their victim very weak. He still lay almost helpless in the young giant's arms.

"Aha! now you're getting all right," said Jerry, joyfully. "Now you can tell me what ailed you."

Harold smiled feebly—bitterly.

"Alas! can you not guess?" he murmured. "Was not the self-forced acting of such a part before that diabolical hound enough to unhinge me when the relief—the reaction came?"

Jerry struck his forehead with his fist.

For the first time, he fully comprehended the refined sensitiveness of the manly but delicate organization, in which the mere counterfeiting of a dishonorable action, or ignoble acquiescence in villainy, was tantamount to spiritual suicide and emotional torture.

"Fool that I was, not to *know* you were only acting of it!" he exclaimed, self-reproachfully. "Oh, Mr. Harold, you alone are worthy of such a love as Marion's! None other can so deserve it! Love her as I do myself, I can still say that—justice compels me to!"

"What! you love her, too?"

"To madness! Else why am I here with you? Why, unless to die, I hope, in saving her, that you may both be happy. But even your mother guessed my secret; you never *would* tumble to it."

But Harold knew it now, together with all the sacrifice and nobleness it implied on the part of that grand and simple nature.

He raised his still feeble hand, and patted his friend gently on the cheek.

"Poor Jerry!" said he, softly. "There is none other like you. Nature broke the mold in making you."

That was all; the subject was never after referred to between them.

Thoroughly worn out, they sought their couch, and were soon buried in forgetfulness.

Wonders were wrought in the Cavern of Skulls while they slept.

They awoke to find it hung with tapestry, carpeted with the wonders of the Axminster looms and richly furnished.

A large center-table was supplied with various entertaining books and the periodical literature of the day.

They had been awakened by a hasty closing of the prison-door, and even a delicious breakfast, smoking hot and elegantly served, was awaiting them.

"Our enemy can be a good magician at will," cried Harold, springing out of bed. "Here's enchantment, anyway!"

"No," said Jerry, imitating his example; "I stick to my first impression. It's the stage of the Old Bowery Theater over again, rigged out for a Christmas pantomime."

After that they fared as sumptuously as they could desire.

Days passed in rather pleasing monotony, whose only disagreeable interruption was a periodical visit from Indian Dickey, to demand if an answer was ready for Mr. Bernard.

To be sure, the reply invariably returned was "Not yet," but the boy grew more and more haughty, suspicious and even insolent with each demand.

But at last two whole days passed without his putting in an appearance, and the pampered prisoners were consequently delectated.

Still, this sense of relief was modified by a

consciousness that the week of permitted procrastination was rapidly drawing to a close.

In fact, only two days were left.

At last there came a curt reminder of this from Mr. Bernard, delivered by one of the jailers.

"Day after to-morrow morning," he wrote, "the allotted time will have fully sped, and I shall be on hand for my answer. Have it for me indubitably, or I shall be without pity, without remorse."

Jerry listened to the reading, and then looked at Harold inquiringly.

"What shall you do?" he asked.

Harold dissembled his uneasiness.

"Hope for something to turn up between now and his visit," he replied.

"But suppose nothing does turn up?"

Harold drew a long breath; then his jaws tightened resolutely.

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

"I shall defy him, of course—him and his infernal proposition."

"In the face of death?"

"Yes."

"In spite of Miss Marion's entreaty to the contrary?"

"In spite of everything. I shall refuse to even *seem* to renounce her."

"It will cost you your life."

"My manhood will remain unsullied."

Jerry clasped him to his heart.

"You are, indeed, worthy of Marion Bernard's priceless love!" he exclaimed, brokenly. "I feared you would give in at the end. I am always misjudging you somehow."

But not a word, not a complaint, for his own immolated passion; not a thought of his own life which would likewise pay the penalty of the contemplated defiance!

Which love was the greatest and noblest, after all, Harold's or Jerry's?

But something *did* turn up between then and Mr. Bernard's final demand.

On the following morning, soon after the first faint streak of dawn had threaded the starry watchers of the eastern sky, both Harold and Jerry were awakened by the huge key of their dungeon door being rattled warningly in its lock.

"It must be another visit from Indian Dickey," said Jerry, springing up, and beginning to dress. "He came once before, you remember, at just such an untimely hour."

The Hurricane Detective imitated his example, but in a different mood.

"I think you are wrong," said he, slowly.

"It is doubtless Bernard himself, twenty-four hours ahead of his time, and impatient for his final answer. Well, he shall have it, with a vengeance."

He displayed a small carving-knife, which he had managed to secrete upon his person, without its being missed from the table complement.

"Good!" said Jerry. "Look, my boy; I had privately made up my mind to the same end." And he opened and shut one of his enormous hands with a wrenching, throttling motion that was sufficiently significant.

Each had secretly determined on the same course, as a last resort, without the other suspecting it—to overpower, and, if necessary, destroy their arch-enemy and persecutor at one fell swoop.

But it was only, to all appearance, the graceful figure of the Indian boy that entered a moment later.

"Ah, Master Dickey! is it you?" said Harold, with a breath of relief. "We were fearing that you had wholly deserted us."

The visitor motioned him to silence, and then bent with an ear to the door, as though to listen for the last retreating footfall down the stony passage without.

Both prisoners were surprised.

Surely it was Indian Dickey, graceful and handsome as ever in the dim, uncertain light, but where was the hauteur and insolence with which he had latterly treated them.

The new-comer advanced slowly, falteringly toward them, doffing the fantastic hunter's cap that rested so jauntily on the waving dark locks.

Then there was an immense revelation.

"Harold!"

"Marion!"

The reunited lovers were in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MARION'S PLOT.

THE visitor was indeed Marion, admirably made up to resemble Indian Dickey in almost every particular, to the smallest item of costume, and even to the darkening of her looped-up hair and the nut-brown coloring of her complexion.

The first transports over, she blushing withdrew from her lover's embrace and gave a shy hand to Jerry, who only just touched it and then retired to the back of the dungeon with a few inarticulate words.

Then the lovers were once more forgetful of everything but themselves.

The door leading out upon Osprey Roost had

been left open by reason of the sultriness of the night.

Marion pointed through it toward the east, now slowly brightening and reddening in the swift footsteps of the coming day.

"I am here to save you," she said. "In less than an hour's time we ought to be as free and untrammelled as yonder springing rays of golden light."

Harold seated himself and drew her to his side, looking delighted down into her beautiful lineaments, pale though they were through their artificial tinting, by reason of her recent anxieties and sufferings.

"I know, I feel that," said he. "With you, my beloved, once more at my side, freedom, safety and happiness must be assured."

She kissed him.

"Let us hope so," she murmured.

"I feel it in my soul," he went on, fondly. "Just talk and answer at present without moving away from me."

She nestled yet closer.

"Now tell me how we are to escape," said he.

"Down Ladder Hole."

"You astonish me. We have looked down it once. It seemed unfathomable."

"It is, nevertheless, but two hundred feet deep."

"And the water that one can hear dashing about down there, like the echo of subterranean waves?"

"That is just what they are."

"How?"

"Ladder Hole communicates with the waters of the lake that reaches far in under this mountain-cliff."

"Ah! but two hundred feet!"

"I have brought the wherewithal to overcome the depth."

She showed him a package.

"What is that?"

"A rope-ladder, slender and light, but long enough and of the strongest twisted silk."

"Ah! Well, once down the hole?"

"A boat awaits us at the bottom."

"And then?"

"You have remarked a wild little island about a mile away, and not far from the eastern lake-shore?"

"Often."

"That shall be our first destination. It is not far from old Guernsey's house, where I have been a prisoner. The island is uninhabited and a honeycomb of caves, ravines and glens. Pursuit can be defied there."

"Well, after the island?"

"Thence we must bend every energy to seeking an interview with the mysterious mad woman at Guernsey's."

"You deem the captive your mother?"

"I feel almost certain of it."

"Yet you have had no interview with her?"

"None."

"Nor even seen her?"

"No; she is too jealously guarded."

"We shall solve the mystery, or die in trying to."

"I knew you would say that."

"Now as to how you have accomplished all this?"

He playfully indicated her boy's costume.

"All through Indian Dickey's assistance. Our figures are similar, and, as for the costume, it is the very same he wore."

"I can't understand the boy's friendliness. He has been the reverse of that when here of late."

"Ah! but then he had not quarreled with his father."

"So. They met here but once, and then it was evident that there was no love wasted between them."

"You are mistaken. They love each other ill-governedly—furiously. Moreover, their tempers are equally detestable. And then the boy owes the father an old and rankling grudge."

"For what?"

"For his never having been permitted to bear the family name. Even while idolizing the boy, in his rough, animal way, Mr. Bernard has systematically kept him in degraded obscurity and repression. In a word, he hates the memory of the poor Indian wife and mother."

"I understand. So there was an open outbreak between them?"

"A frightful one. The boy was half-murdered in the fight that ensued!"

"Oho!"

"He has the revengeful feelings of his race. He fled to the island fastness I have indicated. I escaped from old Guernsey's espionage, sought out the injured youth, and have faithfully nursed him night after night. He is no less grateful than vindictive. That explains the assistance that he has afforded my plot."

"Not quite."

"What else?"

"You have written it. Indian Dickey is also in love with you."

Marion smiled a little sadly.

"Was, rather than *is*," she said. "A boy's passion, that I have partly reasoned him out of. He is now heart and soul for us both, while treasuring his deep and abiding resentment against my guardian."

"It all seems like a dream. When must we make the descent in Ladder Hole?"

"Immediately. Two hours hence will be breakfast time at old Guernsey's, when my escape will be made known. We must be buried away in the island long before this."

"Tell me, first, if you have heard or seen anything further of my wretched sister." And here Harold gave Marion a brief summary of everything that had chanced since their separation.

She listened in mingled terror and wonder.

"What dreadful dangers you have escaped!" said she. "But I have heard nothing more of Fanny and her little boy."

"Nor of Albert Guernsey?"

"Nor of him. Yet I can't help an unpleasant premonition that both, together with that Major Moreton, are fated to be still further mixed up with my history."

"Let us hope that your premonition is an idle one."

"I try to do that. However, soon after being brought to the neighborhood here, I managed to write a long letter to Mrs. Forsyth, explaining everything, and I managed to post it, too."

"That was well. She is a shrewd and energetic woman. In event of the worst, she is capable of coming to our assistance with the law at her back."

"So I thought. Now tell me, would you finally have heeded my advice with regard to deceiving Mr. Bernard?"

"By assuming to renounce you?"

"Yes."

"Never; I would have laughed him to scorn." And he briefly recounted the determination both he and Jerry had come to.

Marion grew grave, though she could not but be secretly pleased.

"He would have been murderously incensed," said she. "It would have cost you your lives."

"Perhaps not; but let us not think of past horrors," and he once more clasped her in his arms. "My angel! And how was it that you were so quietly spirited out of your bedroom at the Widow Cleaver's cottage?"

"It all happened in a flash—like an evil dream," said Marion, with a shudder. "I had packed my trunk and was about to rejoin you, when I was seized from behind, gagged, chloroformed; and I knew nothing more until far on the way hither with my captors. Come, time wastes. Harold, we must delay no longer."

"One last kiss first."

As Marion again submitted to the chaste embrace, she faced the open Osprey Roost door, which was at that instant darkened by a figure passing out of it.

She screamed, disengaging herself, and Harold also turned.

The figure was that of Jerry, until now all but forgotten in their selfish transports, and with a terrible look of emotional suffering on his honest face.

He had seen and heard all, and what torturing anguish it must have caused his devoted yet hopeless heart.

His step was upon the giddy ledge without, though his pale face was still turned toward them with a pitifully mute farewell in it.

Both Marion and Harold sprung toward him in an agony of too-late remorse.

They were powerless to prevent the catastrophe.

Jerry had already leaped into the abyss.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"LADDER-HOLE."

MARION, half-fainting, fell into her lover's arms in a paroxysm of convulsive weeping.

Still supporting her, and with a cheek as blanched as her own, Harold peered over the shuddering edge.

Then he bore her back into the cell, feeling for the moment like a murderer, red-handed in his crime.

Sheer into the lake, straight as a plummet, Jerry's great body had plunged from that awful height, and the water had closed over his head.

Recovering somewhat from the shock, Harold lost no time in resuscitating Marion.

They then set about perfecting their plan of escape, in a swift, but spiritless, mechanical way, without any spoken reference to the tragedy, as though possessing thought, sense and motion, with the blood still frozen in their veins with extreme horror.

That faithful, loyal heart! That he had impulsively, yet with a sort of desperate deliberation, taken the fatal leap with suicidal intent, rather than a continuance of the jealous but uncomplaining agonies which their inconsiderate tenderness had caused him, was not to be doubted.

Harold had learned the trick of the wrist, and soon had removed the great flat stone covering Ladder-Hole.

Down into it he lowered the rope-ladder Marion gave him, after thoroughly testing its efficiency, making it fast by the same stout iron staples to which the short fragment of the ancient rope-ladder was still clinging.

The preliminary preparations were then complete.

"Go first," said Harold. "My greater weight may better come last."

"No," said Marion. "For that very reason it must go first—also for another reason."

He hesitated.

"For what other reason?"

"I shall not be murdered if captured before following you down. Moreover, I know the secret of closing the rock back again over our heads, while you do not. Indian Dickey instructed me. Delay no longer!"

He strained her to his heart, kissed her, and descended into the hole.

Marion waited in an agony of suspense until a series of studied vibrations from far below signaled her that he had reached the bottom in safety.

Then she followed; the flat stone was replaced over her disappearing head; and the Cavern of Skulls was left to emptiness.

It had been a bold attempt for even the Hurricane Detective's nerves. How much more trying, then, for the young girl's! But she was brave of heart, and felt her way slowly down through the solid, unrelieved darkness of the mountain's heart.

The descent seemed well nigh interminable, but at last she could see the faint glimmering of water below, and then distinguish Harold's beloved voice calling up to her.

"Where are you standing?" she called out.

"In the boat. You will come directly into my arms. But it is still awfully dark down here."

"Search around in the boat," she called. "You will find a lantern, matches to light it, and other articles. All has been provided for."

This was done.

When he at last received her in the boat, a lighted lantern flung its rays over a vast underground water-space, whose opening out upon the lake could be faintly distinguished far away.

The vaulted arch over this blind inlet was lofty in some places, but very low-hanging in others.

"Why, there are fire-arms and ammunition, also, here," said Harold, continuing his examination of the boat.

"Yes; I thought they might prove useful."

"What! did you fetch the boat in here?"

"Yes; night before last. Indian Dickey advised everything, but is still disabled from more than crawling around the island. Delay not! I must, if possible, be back to old Guernsey's before my absence is noted."

Harold seized the oars.

In ten minutes they issued from under the cliff out upon the glad surface of the lake, now rejoicing in the glorious reflections of the sunrise.

Harold rested a moment on his oars to look up, with an involuntary shudder, at the towering face of the cliff with Osprey Roost looking like a mere speck midway up the wall.

"Thus far we are safe!" he exclaimed, reaching back to seize his companion's hand and press it to his lips. "Let us thank God for that."

She burst into tears.

They were the first she had been able to shed since Jerry's plunge, and now there was an agony of weeping.

"Saved, yes!" she sobbed. "But of him, over whom these hungry and treacherous waters are now dancing so deceitfully? Oh, it is awful!"

Harold was also terribly agitated, but he managed to control himself sufficiently to soothe her as best he might.

"Let us pray," said he, at last. "God has protected us thus far; He will hear our mingled thanksgivings and remorsefulness."

This pious suggestion was gratefully seized upon.

After kneeling and praying at her lover's side, Marion felt calmer; or, at all events, her courage and hopefulness were renewed.

Then Harold once more seized the oars and the boat was headed for the island.

The sun was just peeping over the mountain-tops when they made a landing at about the only place practicable—a little cove running far in among gigantic rocks, which also furnished a capital concealment for the boat.

"Come," said Marion, springing ashore. "I shall lead you to Indian Dickey's retreat and then lose no time in making my way back to Guernsey's. Then you will probably not see me again until to-night."

The island was just as she had characterized it—a honeycomb of caverns, ravines and glens, and yet for the most part thickly forested.

"This is truly a wild and uncanny place," said Harold, as he followed her along a tortuous path. "Has it a name?"

"Considerable of a name. You are on Red Death Island."

"Ah! And doubtless, also, a smugglers' resort in the old days?"

"Yes, and the scene of unnumbered crimes, it is said."

"But why is one so safe from pursuit here now?"

"You expressed it in the word 'uncanny.' Terrifying ghosts are its populace."

"They seem to have settled the entire region. The Cavern of Skulls was not a bad trysting-place for them in its way, and then there was the Haunted House, to which poor Jerry and I were first introduced after the railway slaughter."

"Yes; that was the old colonial homestead of my family. But this island surpasses all localities hereabouts in superstitious attributes. The fishermen will not fish under its shadow, if they can avoid it, and even the mid-summer tourists are unacquainted with its mysteries, as yet."

"Not to mention your own nerve, my dear Marion, Indian Dickey must have a good deal of pluck to put up with solitude in such a place."

"In spite of his Indian blood, I believe the boy is wholly insensible to fear of any and every description."

They had now reached the center of the island, and were threading a particularly wild and forbidding glen.

"In a few minutes we shall be at the cabin," said Marion, pausing a moment to recover her breath.

"You say," said Harold, "that I am to be separated from you throughout the day?"

"Yes; it must be so."

"And to-night?"

"I hope by that time to have hit on some plan by which you can accompany me secretly to Guernsey's house."

"For the purpose of getting access to the mysterious prisoner there?"

"Yes."

They pushed on, presently entering a beautiful little grassy glade, with a rivulet brawling across it.

Here they were suddenly brought to an astounded standstill.

A man, dripping wet, was stretched on a grassy bank, plunged in the profound sleep, or perhaps faint, that comes of utter exhaustion.

That man was Jerry Cleaver.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ISLAND REFUGE.

"Now God be praised, indeed!" was Harold's first ejaculation. "His hand is in it all!"

"But wait!" cried Marion, clasping her hands, and running forward. "If he has swum this distance, he may be dying."

Together they bent over the colossal but enfeebled form, and sought by every device to restore it to warmth and vigor.

Jerry opened his eyes, recognized them with a faint smile, but seemed unable to move hand or foot.

But, luckily, among the articles Harold was carrying from the boat was a large flask of brandy.

An external and internal application of its contents proved effective.

Jerry bestirred himself little by little, smacked his lips, tasted of the spirits again, took a long pull at it, and finally sat up.

Then he got upon his feet, gave himself an extra shake, and seemed to be almost himself again.

"It was a long dive, an' a yet longer swim," said he, apologetically. "Still, there was no excuse for me fainting away like a baby."

"Excuse!" cried Marion. "Why, it is a wonder that you are not dead!"

Jerry made no explanation as to why he had leaped from Osprey Roost.

The inference was sufficiently plain, however, that, overhearing what had passed between the self-engrossed lovers, he had, under the maddening influence of a despairing moment, sprung into the lake with suicidal intent; when, thinking better of it, after rising to the surface, he had headed for the island, which he had overheard Marion describe, and made a landing there but a short time before being found in an exhausted condition.

A few steps further on, along the water-course, brought them to an old cabin, before which Indian Dickey was sitting idly in the sun.

Leaving them to make their own explanations to the boy, Marion said a hurried farewell, and then dashed away, retracing the path at the top of her speed.

It wanted a quarter to eight when she effected a landing on the opposite shore, but she succeeded in reaching her room, unperceived, in Guernsey's house, and changing her dress, before breakfast was announced.

As she sat down to table unconcernedly with Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey, a hideously ugly old woman waiting upon them, she noticed that they were observing her with a sort of embarrassment in their looks.

Being very hungry, and feeling, moreover, reasonably secure in her secret, she went on with her breakfast quite composedly.

"We're to have some more visitors," said old Guernsey, abruptly.

"But you haven't had any yet," said Marion, without betraying any curiosity.

"How's that? Ain't you a visitor?"

"Hardly. Better call me a guest, if prisoner is disagreeable to you."

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Bernard. "You are no prisoner here, Marion. You—you are simply detained until we can get married, you know."

"Indeed!"

He assumed a half-bantering, a half-serious tone.

"Come, now," said he. "Suppose I should presently tell you something that would make me less distasteful to you."

"It isn't at all likely, sir."

"But suppose I should be able to tell you truthfully that Harold Harcourt has renounced you."

"You couldn't tell me so in truth. It is preposterous!"

"Not so preposterous as it seems. He has also promised to do so—for a pecuniary consideration."

She affected a painful start.

"Ah, you say so! But you are capable of saying anything."

"By heaven, I speak of nothing but the most probable!" said Mr. Bernard, with genuine earnestness. "Tell me, Marion, if I succeed in bringing you a convincing proof that Harold has agreed to throw you over—"

She laid down her fork, seemingly overcome, but rallied.

"To throw you over," he went on, "and for a mercenary consideration, will you then at last give in to my suit?"

Her answer was beyond his highest anticipations.

"Yes," said she, in an affected tone of weariness and dejection. "I should not then care what happened—you might do with me as you pleased."

He sprang to his feet.

"What!" he cried, eagerly. "You would then consent to marry me?"

Her head dropped on her bosom in indication of her assent.

"Oh, but this is great, this is glorious!" cried Mr. Bernard, joyously. "Marion, I shall bring you the proof of your lover's treason tomorrow morning! I am certain of receiving it. You will not forget your promise?"

"No," said she, faintly, on her way out of the room, "I shall not forget. This is wearing me out. Bring me the proof of that, and I shall no longer object to marrying even you."

She slipped into another room, a little parlor, with closed blinds, next to a piazza, in which Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey were accustomed to chat over their after-breakfast cigars.

"Aren't you afraid Albert may turn up unexpectedly?" she overheard Mr. Bernard say.

"After the treachery we've brought home to him!" Guernsey's stern voice was heard to answer. "Let him try it on!"

After that, she heard everything quite distinctly.

"You have, then," said Mr. Bernard, "given a hint to those detectives who are looking for him?"

"Yes; they will have him dead if he comes within gunshot of the premises."

"You throw him off, then?"

"I did that long ago. Curse him! I would never have looked at him again, but for your intermeddling."

"I thought we could make some further use of him."

"And he has tried to sell us out—we didn't bleed freely enough for him!"

"I'm not finding fault. I only hope he will be nabbed for this last burglary, and that that will be the last of him. But I can't help fearing that he may turn up unexpectedly, like a death's-head at a feast, to the ruin of the young woman's prospects."

"He's safe to keep clear, I tell you. But what if he should turn up? Redfield and the young woman can be trusted to take care of him between 'em, I should say."

"Let us hope so, at least. Albert has become dangerous to us both, and must be silenced—this time effectually, and without money."

"Right you are! But now let us understand this new feature thoroughly. Redfield and the young woman are bent on getting married without unnecessary delay?"

"Yes."

"It will be bigamy."

"Nevertheless, I have made it worth their while. Then the marriage can readily be kept a secret until the necessary divorce shall have been obtained."

"What can Redfield see that is so fascinating in the young woman?"

"Ask me something easy."

"Then there's that brat of hers."

"Yes, yes; but what is all this to you and me? Don't you see that, this bigamous marriage once consummated, Redfield is thenceforth our slave?"

"But hasn't he been such for years—ever since we disposed of Marion's mother?"

"No; only partly so; and then at the cost of what we have paid him for. The rascal! no more pensioning from us hereafter."

Here there was a sound of approaching wheels.

"That must be the young woman," said Guernsey's voice. "Let us bid her welcome. Then we have our own affairs."

Marion sunk palpitating in an obscure corner

of the little parlor as their steps were heard retreating.

Much that she had overheard was incomprehensible to her, but it was none the less mystifying and terrible.

Redfield! Could they have referred to Joel Redfield, the cashier who had companioned her mother's disappearance—the man whom she had all along imagined had been foully murdered in her mother's presence?

Her brain was in a whirl.

And then what young woman and child was alluded to, and in what was the worthless Albert mixed up with these fresh complications?

Unable to satisfactorily piece together what she had heard she remained in her seclusion until the house had become perfectly quiet, and, mindful of her own plot that was so well under way, she stole away.

She intended to skirt the house to the little isolated wing in which the mysterious madwoman was confined and take some further observations as to how an entrance might be effected under cover of darkness, with Harold's and Jerry's assistance.

But she had scarcely set foot on the piazza than she started back in dismay.

A handsome young woman—evidently the newly-arrived guest—was approaching her with a little boy by the hand.

The young woman was Fanny, the little boy Snipsey.

"How do you do, Miss Moreton?" said Fanny, very sweetly. "So it is here that you are rustivating with your good guardian? Well, you shouldn't complain. It is a charming place—for one who is fond of retirement."

Marion could not answer. Even Snipsey, who had at once rushed to her, with an exuberant manifestation of childish delight, was powerless to make her speak at that moment.

A partial explanation of what she had overheard was apparent to her now.

Fanny was the expected guest; her ex-convict husband was the marplot whose possible intermeddling was provided against; but the third factor in the side-complication—the Redfield, who was to venture upon an unlawful marriage with this unprincipled and reckless young woman—who was he?

Even this was explained to her on the spot.

There was a hurried approaching step across the gravel walk, the apparition of a tall, eager gentleman, dressed in the height of fashion, and then, with the pleased exclamation, "Herbert, my own Herbert! you are here at last!" Fanny was clasped in the arms of "Major Herbert St. George Moreton."

So this man and the dead-alive cashier, Joel Redfield, were one and the same!

Marion took advantage of the interruption to steal off around the corner of the house, where she remained concealed behind a curtain of vines.

As she did so Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey also joined the group on the piazza.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FICKLE FANNY.

FORTUNATELY, all the persons composing the group were so busy with the project in hand that Marion was not thought of.

Even little Snipsey had hailed the appearance of the major with great glee, and both Mr. Bernard and Guernsey put on an air of high good-humor.

"Well, here we are together at last," said Mr. Bernard, genially. "Didn't I promise that I would stand by you in this pleasant little romance?"

"We can never thank you enough," murmured Fanny, casting down her eyes, after a glance of sidelong passionateness in the major's direction.

As for the latter, considering his past worldliness, he was acting very much like a lovesick fool.

It was evident that Mr. Bernard had known the weakness, no less than the danger, of the man in assisting him to the criminal step that was perhaps thenceforth to place him in his power; while Fanny, on her part, had yielded to its proposal only the more willingly from her erroneous impression of the fellow's true character and position, added to the fact that her passion for him was genuine in its reckless intensity and unprincipled blindness as to consequences.

"Is the clergyman here?" was the major's first question.

"No, but he has promised to be on hand before the morning wears away," said Mr. Bernard, still smiling. "In the mean time, you can make yourselves as comfortable and lover-like as you please. Come along with me, Snipsey; I'll show you the pretty sights about the farm."

He had indicated some rustic chairs by a hospitable gesture, and now strolled away again, taking the not over-willing Snipsey by the hand, and accompanied by Guernsey.

Marion had seen and overheard this much against her best instincts, which were naturally repelled at the bare idea of eavesdropping, though she at the same time felt in a manner justified by her personal interests, and the con-

sciousness that she was still in a prisoner's position, where all was fair that might be taken advantage of as against her enemies.

But no sooner were Fanny and her admirer left alone than she started to beat a retreat from her secret post of observation.

Then the first words that she chanced to hear them interchange enchaind her afresh, for something more than the tender passion was their theme.

"Don't you fear the step we are about to take?" asked Fanny.

"Not a bit," was the cool reply. "Neither would you if you knew as much as I."

"Herbert, what do you mean?"

"I cannot tell you now. But you may know this much. *I am other than what I seem, and Bill Bernard is making a big mistake in supposing that he is about to get me under his thumb.*"

The words italicized were the ones that completed Marion's resolve, and after that she listened without compunction.

What might she not overhear that would truthfully supplement her imperfect story of her mother's connection with the fate of Joel Redfield—the man, she now firmly believed, who was posing as Major Herbert St. George Moreton?

Moreover, she had also by this time resolved to prevent the contemplated criminal marriage at any cost to herself, as she would have sought to prevent the commission of any great evil, if in her power.

So she stayed, though little dreaming of the dramatic episodes Fate was preparing for her eyes.

"Get you under his thumb in what way?" asked Fanny, a little anxiously.

"By our marriage, of course."

"But how may that place you under Mr. Bernard's thumb?"

"It won't, but he thinks it will."

"But how?"

"You ought to understand." They were seated in the cool shadows now. He suddenly drew her to his side and kissed her. "It's bigamy, ain't it?"

She nestled yet closer, returning his endearments with interest. Easy to see that her unprincipled love for the man was sufficiently self-reckless and self-engrossing in its way.

"Don't call it that," said she. "The word is unpleasantly vulgar. Besides, that wretch is as good as out of the way forever, and I shall soon have the divorce."

"Nevertheless, that it will be, my darling, and nothing else."

"Granted, then. Well?"

"Well, Bernard hopes to hold it over my head hereafter. Up to this time he has been in my power; he hopes to reverse the tables on me."

"And will not be able to do so?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I have something in reserve. I know a little more of his secret—the secret by which I have thus far governed him—than he supposes."

"What is the governing secret?"

"That I cannot tell you—at present."

Fanny pouted.

"I keep nothing from you!"

"No matter; I cannot tell you." And he kissed her again.

"Then tell me why he shall not be able to turn the tables on you."

"Not that, either."

"You are provoking. But he *will* be able to accuse you of bigamy after our marriage."

"Yes; but he won't dare to."

"Why?"

"You little darling! you are only beating about the bush. You must stop it."

"And with what is your governing secret connected—or rather with whom?"

The major laughed.

"With Marion Bernard," he replied—"with her whom you have known and hated as Marion Moreton."

Fanny's fine eyes flashed spitefully.

"I hate her still," said she. "In what way can your secret affect her?"

"That I sha'n't tell you. But a whisper from me would render Bernard's obtaining the girl's consent to marry him an impossibility. Not that he is likely to obtain it in any event, but it would State Prison him for the remainder of his life. There, let that content you; for you shall assuredly know no more."

"But tell me why you sought Mr. Bernard's good offices in consummating this marriage between us."

"I'll tell you that. I have known both Bernard and Guernsey for years, having had much business with both."

"What sort of business?"

"Private business. Directly after the abduction of the young lady from the Harlem cottage, that precious incubus of yours, Albert Guernsey, sought me out with a proposition to sell out both his own father and Bernard in the affair. His scheme was simple. We were to put the police detectives on the scent, set the young lady at liberty, have her get married at once to the man of her choice—your brother—"

and trust to her generous recognition of the service after she should come into her property, which is simply immense. That was all."

"Then you had known Albert before?"

"Years previously—through my connection with Bernard and old Guernsey, of course—and he had somehow replaced me in his recollection."

"Well, what did you do?"

"Promised to think over the rogue's proposition, and at once communicated it to Bernard."

"Why?"

"I couldn't afford to rely on the young lady's prospective generosity. The governing secret, as you call it, was in the way. Sooner or later, she would have to know all, and that would place me in a particularly unfavorable light, with regard to her family history. So I did the next best thing, and betrayed the rogue's plot to Bernard and Guernsey."

"Why had Albert meditated the treachery toward them?"

"From want of money. They had refused his demands. He was incensed and desperate. Of course, he could get none from me. In business, I receive money, but never give it. His desperation completed his ruin."

"How?"

"Old Guernsey, on Bernard's and his own behalf, came visiting me in hot haste. On the night previous (the night after his confidential proposition to me) Albert had committed a burglary in Yorkville. How old Guernsey knew him as the criminal I don't know, but he did, and of course he had him on the hip. He at once communicated the fact to Inspector Byrnes, of the detective force, and then secretly notified Albert of what had been done."

"Quite paternal."

"Very. Having thus disposed of your wretch effectively—"

"You are sure he is so disposed of?" Fanny made the interruption a little anxiously.

"Of course. Since he knows that Byrnes's sleuth-hounds are after him, and doubtless one dose of State's Prison regimen has satisfied him."

"Well?"

"Well, the marplot having been disposed of, both Bernard and Guernsey were becomingly and effusively grateful—in their way."

Fanny put her arm around his neck, and patted his aristocratic cheek—there was more of it to pat, in the figurative sense than she was altogether aware of.

"And then," said she, softly, "you perhaps naturally thought of me?"

"Naturally? Say, rather, wildly, ecstatically! You had already quitted home and were living alone with your charming little boy. But your life was that of a vestal, and I was just mad about you. I mentioned my passion to old Guernsey. It seemed that he and Bernard had somewhat had our case in mind before that. He fairly beamed his cordiality—that is, so far as old Guernsey is capable of beaming, which isn't paralyzing in the way of effulgence. The result was the proposition that brings you and me together, my darling Fanny, at the present hour."

Fanny threw both her shapely arms around him.

"You do not regret it?" she murmured. "Tell me that you do not regret it, Herbert!"

"Regret it?"

He was returning her embrace, when Fanny gave a faint scream and tore herself from his arms.

Her eyes were startlingly directed toward a near evergreen clump just across the graveled walk, out of which had at that moment stepped—Albert Guernsey!

Her companion became aware of the apparition almost at the same instant, and involuntarily fell into an attitude of defense, though with obvious embarrassment and uneasiness.

Albert was looking ragged and dirty—a hunted, ruined wretch for all the world—but there was a wolfish look in his face, a ferocious glitter in his eyes, a Bowie-knife in his grip.

Before a word could be spoken, however, Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey, wholly oblivious of the changed situation, made their smiling appearance from the house accompanied by a stiffly correct and ceremonious personage with country parson written over every square-inch of him.

"My dear friends," Mr. Bernard beamingly began, "I have the pleasure of informing you that our ministerial friend has arrived even sooner than was anticipated. Of course, you are correspondingly delighted, for the hymeneal bonds may now— But, eh? What's up? You do not seem exactly—"

Here he caught sight of Albert and came to a fluttering but at the same time angry pause.

Old Guernsey had seen him a little before and was advancing to the edge of the piazza with a terrible frown.

"Outcast! Reprobate! Traitor!" he thundered, "begone!"

Albert burst into a furious rage.

"Curse you all!" he vociferated, with a volley of oaths; "if you have outwitted me, I shall still berevenge. Fanny, you shameless baggage! jail-

bird as I am, I blush to call you wife. But stand off from that villainous fop at your side, or I'll have your life, no less than his!"

Fanny, pale and trembling, had flown to the major and still clung to him.

Old Guernsey placed a small whistle to his lips and sounded a shrill blast.

"Begone, outcast!" he once more exclaimed.

"For the last time I warn you!"

But the desperate man heeded him not.

"You, Joel Redfield!" he cried, gnashing his teeth, "I am here to kill you. Villains, all of you! do you dare defy me, with the murder of Marion Bernard's mother heavy on your souls? Do you doubt that I can accuse you, even with a rope around my neck and my feet on the gallows-drop?"

Clutching his knife with a frenzied grip, he sprang toward 'the major,' as we still call him for the present, with a sort of murderous howl.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TROUBLE IN THE HOSTILE CAMP.

BUT old Guernsey's signal had not been in vain.

Two rough-and-ready-looking men had suddenly slipped into view from either side of the evergreen copse.

They were, moreover, evidently men well used to such emergencies.

Before the miserable Albert could make his second bound toward his intended victim, he was seized, disarmed, and with the handcuffs on his wrists.

He vindicated his vaunted reputation as a veteran jail-bird.

Quietly submitting to arrest, he laughingly complimented his captors upon their dexterity.

"Is it for that little house-breaking in Yorkville?" he asked.

One of the men nodded.

"All right; take notice that I plead guilty in advance. So far as saving the State an unnecessary expense I am a law-abiding man. Take me away."

As they led him away, he nodded to the group on the piazza with a carelessness that disguised the deadly internal viciousness of his farewell.

Both Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey seemed wonderfully pleased at the upshot of the interruption, while the major and Fanny, with their self-complacency thoroughly restored, came toward them, hand-in-hand.

"Now, Mr. —," remarked Mr. Bernard, turning to the parson, "we will adjourn to the parlor, if you please, and nothing further shall delay the happy ceremony."

He had, however, reckoned without his host; the parson recoiled in horror and indignation.

"But I don't please!" he exclaimed. "What! when I just heard the young woman proclaimed as another man's wife?"

He clapped his ministerial tile on the back of his head, and strode away from the house as if it were the very nest of iniquity—which is just what it was, barring Marion's enforced presence therein.

"I'll have you kicked out of your congregation!" roared Mr. Bernard after him, in a towering rage. "You'll miss marrying me to my ward, with the thumping big fee I promised you!"

Dire as was the threat, no attention was paid to it.

Just then a man was observed running toward the house from the direction of the stables in a terrible state of excitement.

It was the subordinate villain, Yager.

"What is it?" exclaimed Bernard and Guernsey, in one breath.

The man came to a pause before them, panting and glaring.

"The prisoners in the Cavern of Skulls!" he gasped.

Bernard gave a sort of snarl, and grasped him by the throat.

"What of them?" he snarled.

"Escaped!"

"You lie! Impossible! Who last visited them?"

"Indian Dickey, at daybreak this morning. He's gone, too."

"Incredible! I thrashed him within an inch of his life. He's in hiding somewhere, with hardly a whole bone in his body."

The minion roughly released himself from the throttling grasp.

"I don't care," sullenly. "Don't try that on again, or you and I shall quarrel. It's as I tell you."

"But how could they have escaped?"

"Don't know. No one knows. Cell empty. Either by Ladder Hole or Osprey Roost, perhaps."

Mr. Bernard was livid, and old Guernsey was no less disturbed, though under better control.

The former beckoned to him, and they hurried away together.

Yager followed, but more leisurely, growling to himself, and with his hand to his throat.

Left to themselves, the disappointed lovers disconsolately retired to a distant interior, called thither by Snipsey's voice in a dolorous howl, as though he might have come to grief in the kitchen or wash-room.

The coast was clear for Marion, who had witnessed and overheard everything with such emotions as can better be imagined than portrayed. She at once slipped around to the lonely wing in which she knew the mysterious prisoner to be confined.

This wing, which was encircled by a continuation of the piazza, was the most ancient portion of the old house, which had been built, or added on to, at various periods.

But it was thoroughly secured.

The windows, with heavy green shutters always jealously fastened shut, might also be heavily grated on the inside, though of course this was only conjecturable.

It was of but one story, consisting perhaps of two or more rooms, and was connected with the larger or main building by a narrow covered gallery, always sedulously guarded by an old man called Boomer, or in his brief absences by his wife, the hideously ugly old woman who had waited at the breakfast table. There were servants besides these, a cook and a chambermaid, almost equally non-committal and disagreeable; but those two had their sleeping apartment in the gallery, and their domestic specialty was in guarding and looking after the inmate of the west wing, as it was called.

There were two outside doors, one at the end, the other at the side—each guarded by an enormous Siberian bloodhound, on chain within two feet of the threshold.

As Marion stepped off the piazza, to be out of reach of the canine guardian at the side-door, while taking her observations, the animal, which had been asleep in the sun, aroused himself with surprising quickness and suddenness.

Bristling with suspicious rage, he leaped at her the full length of his chain, bellowing furiously, showing his terrible fangs, and exhibiting altogether about as much amiability as a roused menagerie yellow-and-black striped jungle monarch, fresh from his native solitude, and with a newly-thrown chunk of reeking flesh between his ponderous paws.

Indeed, the comparison, if anything, is slightly libelous on the tiger.

Given the satisfaction of its appetite, and the latter may even be susceptible to a little wheedling; but Marion had already tried the experiment of tempting these cerberuses with choice bits of meat, secreted from her plate, when she knew them to be particularly hungry, and without success, showing conclusively that they could be even proof against the surreptitious offer of poisoned meat on occasion.

While the dog was barking at her, a little window at the side of the covered way was opened, and Mrs. Boomer thrust out her unprepossessing head.

"So, you're snooping around here once again, Miss Marion, are you?" she called out angrily.

"What are you doing there?"

"Strictly minding my own business, ma'am, if it is any satisfaction to you to know it," replied Marion, sharply, for she would not submit to any incivility on the part of the servants. "Please to bear in mind that you are not my keeper, howsoever unfortunate some other may be in that respect."

There was a yet angrier retort, and she kept on her way around the wing, equally regardless of the end-door watch-dog and its similarly furious demonstrations.

But her observations of to-day brought her little more satisfaction than their predecessors.

It was not for the first time that she ended them by looking with sad earnestness and almost despair at the grim, forbidding exterior of that west wing.

It seemed impregnable at every point, and not a hint had she thus far been able to obtain of its mysterious inmate.

"But I know that she is there, I feel that she is my unhappy mother, and I shall not despair," she resolutely murmured. "No, no: this night shall tell the story at any cost. With dauntless Harold and giant Jerry to support the undertaking, we cannot, we must not fail!"

Having decided upon her line of action between then and the longed-for hours of darkness, she made a brief circuit through the adjoining groves, so as to be seen, if seen at all, approaching the main building from an unsuspecting quarter.

While doing so she became conscious of being watched and followed, but as this was a common occurrence, it did not cause her any particular alarm or even annoyance.

But as she presently recognized the spy as the tall, dark man who has been briefly described as "Jabe" or "Jabez," she called out to him pleasantly:

"Don't be afraid of me, Jabe! I wouldn't hurt you, even if you should chance to brush against me."

The man looked sheepish, skulked a little nearer, and respectfully touched his cap.

"It ain't my fault if I'm in the dirty business of spyin' onto the likes of you, Miss Marion," said he. "I'm only obeyin' orders."

She looked at him with grave simplicity.

"I remember you when I was no more than a child," said she, gently. "My father was then your good friend, no less than your indulgent employer."

The man's features worked. Then, pulling his cap over his eyes, he almost rushed out of her presence, with a confused string of unintelligible words that were very like oaths.

"He's swearing to himself in the vain hope of stifling the still, small voice of remorse," thought Marion. "Perhaps there are others like him hereabouts, if they could only be reached. Poor Jabez! I pity his degradation."

She went to her room, and for some time thereafter was occupied with certain mysteries of the toilet, with which she was but little familiar.

When she appeared at the mid-day meal, at which both Fanny and the major were present as the guests of the house, and where Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey were in a surly enough humor, her guardian looked up at her in stern displeasure.

CHAPTER XXXVII. THE BURNT TREE.

"WHAT is the matter with you?" growled Mr. Bernard.

Marion hurriedly wiped away a first-class forced tear, while the eyes of every one else at table were instantly attracted to her.

"I'm not aware that anything that would interest you, sir, is the matter with me," she faltered, with a quivering lip. "There is nothing the matter, then."

"Girl, you prevaricate. Your eyes are red, your cheeks hollow—you are white as a ghost!"

Marion burst into tears.

"Can I help it?" she sobbed. "Harold is dead—I know he is—and you, what are you but his murderer?"

"Nonsense! I can't believe he's dead. He's off with Indian Dickey and that Brobdiagnagian chum of his through Ladder Hole, for we've found the rope ladder they got down by. Never fear, though, but we'll catch them yet. Every avenue of escape is guarded, the whole countryside is being scoured."

Here he caught old Guernsey's cautioning frown, and stopped abruptly.

"Fall in with her impression, you fool! fall in with it!" the latter whispered at her elbow. "Don't you see how vastly it will help your suit?"

Mr. Bernard at once saw his error, and proceeded to correct it in accordance with this advice, uncomplimentarily as it was given.

He began to blame himself for a too strict government of his Skull Cavern prisoners. Other men had been driven to despair and even self-destruction by less than a week's captivity, and why not they? He would have the lake dragged in the vicinity of Ladder Hole and Osprey Roost for the drowned bodies, for escape was impossible by either means without being intercepted by death. He amiably accused himself of having driven Harold, together with Jerry and his own son, to suicide. He became moved to crocodile tears. The aim of his life should be to make up to Marion for her loss by ever-increasing love, indulgence and tenderness on his part.

But Marion was not to be consoled. After continuing her sobs and her accusations, though in a somewhat milder form, she hurried away to her room, apparently altogether overcome.

Her room was, fortunately, within easy earshot of the more sociable portion of the piazza, which it overlooked.

She was, consequently, all attention when Mr. Bernard and old Guernsey came there for a brief post prandial smoke before setting off on a fresh quest of the escaped prisoners.

"You nearly gave yourself away with the girl," said Guernsey.

"I know I did," admitted the other.

"You might have known it were best for her to think of her lover as dead, since it could not but ultimately help your suit. Young women's love is intense, but shallow; let them but once become settled as to the annihilation of its object, and they turn to a new worship—be it wealth and position, or diamonds and fine clothes, as naturally as a child from a broken toy to a new one."

Mr. Bernard was in capital mood to support just such an ignorant and false piece of sophistry.

"But I corrected myself," said he, eagerly. "It will be all right now."

"Perhaps so, if you didn't overdo it," Marion overheard Guernsey growl, half under his breath.

"What about Redfield and his enchantress now?" asked Bernard, adding: "What a pity that our little game failed in that quarter! though it can't be helped, and we may have better luck next time."

"No; not again—that job's dead," said Guernsey, crustily. "I have already decided as to them, and they have been notified."

"What have you decided?"

"Fanny is to take herself off at once—this afternoon."

"And our redoubtable major?"

"He can stay as long as he pleases, or follow her, but not before to-morrow. They must neither remain nor leave in each other's company."

"Aren't you growing strait-laced?"

"Not exactly. But what would you? The young woman is still my son's lawful wife, and my house is a temple of respectability, or nothing."

There was a pause, and then the simultaneous roar of laughter in which they joined together attested the potency of the jocular sarcasm that had evoked it.

Marion reddened with indignation where she sat; then she shuddered at the depravity that could glory in or be amused at such heartless ridicule of what should be one's sacred boast—the purity of the home altar!

"What about our fugitives?" said Guernsey, when the common hilarity had been somewhat exhausted. "Are they off, think you, through the country or up the lake?"

"There's no telling with any certainty yet," said Mr. Bernard. "To-day our whole force is scouring across-country. If not captured in the interim, all are pledged to rendezvous with us at nine o'clock to-night at the Burnt Tree for further instructions."

"Nine o'clock at the Burnt Tree!" repeated Guernsey, in a disturbed tone.

"What of it?"

"I don't like the spot, that's all."

"Pshaw! the old superstition. However, I've always suspected you of credulity in such nonsense, in spite of your natural hard-headedness."

"Superstition or no superstition," said Guernsey, yet more uneasily, "facts are facts that are not to be gainsayed."

"Facts? Rather, old women's ghost-tales! Ridiculous!"

"I tell you they are true. Ever since Murderer's Tree, as it was called in the old times, was scorched by lightning nearly a hundred years ago, terrible things have been witnessed there, and invariably at nine o'clock at night. My grandfather witnessed one of them, and was palsied the next day. An aunt of mine saw another, many years later, and was soon afterward tarred and feathered as a witch, subsequently dying of the maltreatment. These things are known!"

Mr. Bernard burst into his unpleasant laugh.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, derisively. "And pray what were these nine-o'clock manifestations, Guernsey?"

"Oh, various terrifying and ill-omened things. Mostly, they say, the limbs become sheathed with fire, there are strange explosions from somewhere up in the charred trunk, and there is a sulphurous smell."

"Gunpowder from hell's arsenal, as a matter of course! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, laugh as you please! Only shallow fools are incredulous as to such unearthly things. But this I can assure you of, Bill Bernard, if you do assemble the bands there, and there should be such a ghostly manifestation—"

"Well, what then?"

"Why, you won't have a man of them to help you in your chase before midnight—no, not if the fugitives from Skull Cavern should crawl across your path with thorns in their feet!"

"And where would they be, if not helping in the pursuit?"

"Bathing in Holy Cross Cove."

"What on earth would they be doing that for?"

"It wouldn't be on the earth, but in the water."

"Curse your impudence! What for, I ask again?"

"As an antidote against the Burnt Tree's curse. Nothing else can save them, and they know it. If my grandfather and aunt had only taken that precaution—"

The superstitious old scoundrel here came to an embarrassed pause.

"They'd have been alive and vigorous to-day, as a matter of course!" supplemented Mr. Bernard, with superlative contempt.

"I didn't say that."

"Well, it would have been on par with the chimney-corner gush you have been giving me. Very well, Guernsey, we'll take our chances at the Burnt Tree to-night; if you are too cowardly to join us, you can stay away. You can carry your griefs to bed with you, as poor Marion will be likely to do for some time to come."

There was a long pause, and then Guernsey spoke again, in a steadier but somewhat sullen tone.

"I'm no coward, as you ought to know by this time, Bernard," said he. "You'll find me at the Burnt Tree, along with the rest, come what may."

His companion clapped him heartily between the shoulders.

"Good! I knew you would come around," he cried. "That is my old chum once more!"

"Well, after the Burnt Tree, what then?"

"Then for the lake. We'll start at daybreak, or early as may be, and, beginning with Red Death Island, ransack every nook, cove, cranny, islet, and indentation of it, from end to end."

"Red Death Island is about as uncanny as the Burnt Tree," said Guernsey, with a slight assumption of his uneasiness.

"I like the spot as little as you," admitted Bernard, "though perhaps for a more substantial reason."

"I should say so. It was there that you entrapped Marion's mother and Redfield just after—"

"Shut up!" cried Bernard, with an oath—and he was not used to profanity, either; "can't you let the dead past bury its dead? We'll begin the lake-search with Red Death Island, anyway, if the heavens rain fire!"

"I'm agreed, if you are."

"Come, then; let us see some of the pursuit proceeds."

They then hurried away.

Marion, with such emotions and reflections as can be imagined, remained at her post till she had seen Fanny, with Snipsey, drive away in the coach that had brought her, after taking a touching farewell of the major, who then strolled off down the road in the direction that Mr. Bernard and Guernsey had taken.

Then dressing herself for a stroll, but veiling her face, and keeping up the mourning demeanor that she had assumed so successfully at the dinner table, Marion also quitted the house.

She first directed her steps through the grove until she came to a strong-built, windowless little log-house that was almost buried out of sight amid towering rocks and scrubby trees.

This was a small arsenal and ammunition store-house, built by the old-time smugglers, and still used to some extent for its original purpose by the wild and lawless spirits under Mr. Bernard's secret leadership.

She had already managed to make herself acquainted with the secret of its entrance and of its contents.

After assuring herself of being this time secure from espionage, she effected an entrance, selected a number of stores, more or less bulky, to the extent of her convenient carrying capacity, and then, quitting the locality with equal circumspection, headed straightway for the Burnt Tree.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. MARION'S NERVE.

THE Burnt Tree was a gaunt, lightning-scarred oak monarch standing alone on a rocky eminence about half a mile back from the lakeshore and midway between Guernsey's house and the Cavern of Skulls.

Guernsey had not exaggerated the superstitious terrors that invested it for the large majority of the rude country population, and Marion had been more or less familiar with its legends from her infancy.

The Burnt Tree's position commanded a wide view over land and lake, but its immediate surroundings were savagely picturesque, not to say forbidding, and a deep, narrow inlet put back from Holy Cross Cove, through deep ravines to within a few hundred yards of its foot.

Marion approached the tree with additional precautions, but without a particle of fear other than lest she might attract the attention of one or more of the spies that had hitherto, save upon rare occasions, systematically dogged her movements.

On this afternoon, whether by reason of the prevailing confusion incidental upon the escape from Skull Cavern, because of her simulated helplessness over the assumed impression of her lover's death, or in view of "Jabe" having been assigned the duty, which he had subsequently relinquished in disgust in the face of the young girl's rebuke, it soon became evident to her that she was enjoying an extraordinary immunity from the accustomed watch and ward.

She took advantage of it to the fullest extent.

Her task was a laborious one and one in which she could bring no experience to her aid, but she performed it well.

After disposing of many of her "stores," in, on and around the tree, she might have been seen proceeding patiently and with bowed form from the foot of it all the way to the rocky brink of the neighboring inlet.

One would have taken her to be planting seed of some fine variety into one continuous drill for the entire distance, and covering it out of sight with exceeding care at every step of the way.

It was late in the afternoon when she had finished her task.

She was so exhausted that she had to treat herself to a long recuperating rest on the bank of the inlet.

Then, satisfied with having successfully evaded spying observation, she set about her return to the house.

About half-way back she once more encountered Jabez.

But he was evidently no longer watching her movements; in fact, he was in a great hurry, as though in the midst of some important commission.

He nevertheless paused, looking at the wearied young girl in much surprise.

"Strolling again, Miss Marion?" said he.

"Yes, Jabe," she replied. "And you—spying again?"

The man's dark face flushed.

"On my honor, no, miss! In fact, you are not thought to need watching at present. You

are looking so poorly, I couldn't help stopping a minute."

Her veil was raised, revealing the pallor of her fatigue, which might well be taken in support of her assumed bereavement.

"Am I so, Jabe?" said she, gently. "How do I look?"

"Pitifully sad—all broke up!"

She sighed.

"That's what made me stop, miss. Besides, I've something to tell you."

"What is it?"

He drew nearer, after an assuring glance of caution thrown around.

"You're grieving without cause, miss. The young gentleman and his friend—I mean the escaped prisoners, of course—are not dead."

She gave a great start, and drew down her veil.

"Are you sure of this, Jabe?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, I'm dead sure of it—every one is! Else why all this rumpus to capture 'em again? Everything points to the conclusion that they're off on the jump."

"How joyful to hear you say so! Which direction have they taken, think you?"

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"Don't care!"

"Not a rush-stalk—and neither do more'n one-half the men in the band, I'm thinking."

"Are they losing zeal in their master's affairs, then?"

"He ain't our master, though he seems to think himself such. He's only our leader."

"Well, one would hardly recognize the distinction. Then they are beginning to lose interest?"

"You can bet they are!"

"Why?"

"Oh, they're not *all* thieves and desperadoes, you see! Many of 'em are merely ignorant fellows, into the organization through a mere spirit of adventure, and for the money he occasionally doles out."

"Then why are they dissatisfied?"

"Well, for several causes. In the first place, they're beginning to fear consequences—especially with regard to that railway slaughter. It was just awful!"

"Was it caused by my guardian's orders?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, and looked uneasy.

"Oh, come now, Miss Marion! Railroad accidents will happen, you know."

"Accidents? Yes; but so many of the same sort have happened hereabouts, as I understand."

"Not to passenger-trains!" said the man, eagerly. "Only to freighters, what might be broke up and robbed—never before to trains crammed with innocent passengers!"

"Ah, that is something of a difference. Well, as to other causes of disaffection in the band?"

"They're too many to mention, though growing every day. But many are down on Bernard for his treatment of you, and of those young fellows, on your account."

"Ah!"

"It's true, miss. There's men enough among us—men who remember the kindness of your poor father to them or to their relatives, in the old times, before Bill Bernard was much more than his half-brother's secretary—men who'd resent seein' a hair of your pretty head injured."

"They've seemed willing enough, though, to assist at my detention here against my will."

"They haven't understood it very well. Besides, this feeling has only been growing of late, and it ain't all the band that's gettin' sick of the business. Remember that."

"But those that you speak of—they have at least assisted at the outrageous imprisonment of Mr. Harcourt and his friend."

"Part of that was out of fear of 'em."

"Fear of them?"

"Yes; from what had been told of their exploits by Yager and Mallock and others of that stripe."

"Ah!"

"Oh, they're terrors—those two! No wonder they call the young gentleman the Hurricane Detective. He's a whole season's bad weather in a muss. And, as for the big man, that hulking big chum of his, why, he's Goliath over again, with a sprinkling of Sullivans and Muldoons mixed up!"

"Then the disaffected ones are not so particular about overtaking the fugitives, after all?"

"Not a bit of it, miss. And what's more is that Bill Bernard had better look to himself."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't explain. But there's to be a gathering at the Burnt Tree to-night. You must remember the awful reputation of the haunted spot?"

Marion nodded.

"Well, many of us will only go there on compulsion. I, for one, don't want to see no corpse-fires playin' round my head at nine o'clock, and perhaps run home to find all my cows dead or all my ricks burned in the morning. And there's plenty more like me. But keep mum

about what I've said, miss, and good luck to you. Glad to see you so much cheerfuller!"

He went on his way, and Marion hurried on, greatly encouraged at what she had heard.

At supper, while sustaining her drooping role, she ate with a good appetite, knowing that she would require all her strength for the night's work, and then retired slowly and sadly with the announced determination to keep her room.

But little attention had been paid her by either Mr. Bernard, old Guernsey or the major, all of whom seemed greatly preoccupied by the work in hand.

They hurried from the table after a hasty meal, and went off up the road together, with a general appearance of not soon returning.

Marion locked her door, and donned her Indian boy's costume.

She had become somewhat used to the novelty of it now, and rather liked it, though wholly unconscious of the ravishing advantage to which her solid but charming figure was set off in the picturesque dress.

Then, after darkness had completely fallen, she stealthily made her way to the ground by means of her window, which was not a high one, and flitted away to the sheltered spot where she had concealed the boat.

The rising moon was just trembling above the mountain-tops as she pushed out of the cove, and with a few noiseless strokes of the oars sent the boat out on the softly-gleaming bosom of the silent lake.

Pausing for a moment to admire the beauty and weirdness of the scene, she pulled cautiously, ever fearful lest the splash of the oars might betray her momentous enterprise to some watchful spy on the shore that was slipping behind her.

Red Death Island was a little more than a mile away.

Precipitous and gloomy, it stood out in grim relief, with an uninterrupted water-interval between, save for a nameless matted islet, a mere speck on the surface, surrounded by a network of pond lilies, rushes and other water-plants, that was not a great distance from the larger island.

In passing close to this islet, Marion suddenly stopped rowing, her heart springing into her throat with wonder and fear.

A hand—a giant hand, as if belonging to the genie of the depths—had been softly extended out of the fringing lily-pads and reeds and was firmly grasping the gunwale of the boat.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A HAND OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

WAS it a human hand? It seemed too large and grand for that, and yet it clutched her boat with a more substantial grip than could have well belonged to a ghostly member.

For perhaps the first time in her life Marion felt a thrill of superstitious fear.

Her heart beat wildly, a scream was rising to her lips; but, before she could utter it, a gentle, reassuring voice said:

"Don't be alarmed; I haven't meant to frighten you."

And then a face and part of a body belonging to the hand made their appearance out of the water and the weeds.

Marion gave an exclamation of relief and astonishment, for the seeming water-god was none other than Jerry!

"Bless me, Mr. Cleaver, how you startled me!" exclaimed the young girl, in continued wonder. "What *are* you doing out here in the water? Has anything happened? Is anything wrong on the island?"

No, nothing was wrong on the island; and Jerry's explanation of his extraordinary situation was not such a very unnatural one, after all.

The suspense of the trio on the island as to the young girl's safety and progress in her plot had grown so great that soon after sunset Jerry had offered to relieve it by swimming out to the intermediate islet, in the hope of discovering thence a nearer view of the main shore, or perhaps a first glimpse of the returning boat.

This he had accordingly done, and on discovering the outlines of the approaching boat without distinguishing the features of the inmate, had merely waded out breast-deep among the lilies for a closer investigation.

"The water ain't *very* cold," said he, with becoming modesty, in conclusion, "and I'm thoroughly at home in the water. I was at one time the boss swimmer of Long Neck Point, and I can show at home the champion's belt for—"

Marion interrupted him with a silvery laugh.

"This is too funny," said she. "You'll be chilled to death in the water here—it makes me shiver only to look at it. Climb aboard and let me row you back to the island."

The half-submerged giant shook his head and blushed in the dim moonlight.

"It wouldn't do, miss. The fact is, I—I am only half dressed, and—I really *would* rather that you'd just tow me over!"

As he spoke he shoved the boat along till his hands were on the stern-post, when he suddenly thrust her far out into the deeper water, he swimming behind, and even propelling the craft

rapidly by the dextrous movements of his limbs and body.

"Why, instead of my towing you," cried Marion, "*you* are pushing me. I never boated in this way before."

"Rest yourself, miss," said the swimming giant. "It will rest you."

She did so, and they actually made the entire distance in this novel form.

On reaching the shore, Jerry floated away amid the shadows, and then disappeared to resume his garments.

Marion was almost instantly joined by Harold, and, to her surprise, by Indian Dickey, who walked quite feebly, but with the glitter undiminished in his restless, coal-black eyes.

"You are overtaking yourself, Dickey," said Marion, after giving her hands to her lover. "It isn't prudent. You must go back to the cabin."

"No, Miss Marion," said the boy, spiritedly. "I must see this thing through with the rest of you. My guidance will be of use to you, and I should pine to death with suspense back there alone."

"It is best that he should have his way," decided Harold, in a low voice. "I don't altogether trust him, but we can keep up a sharp watch."

Here they were rejoined by Jerry, and Marion lost no more time in telling everything that had chanced throughout that eventful day.

She touched but lightly on the Redfield-Albert-Fanny episode, as it might be called, and that without mentioning names, but it was enough for Harold, at least, to understand perfectly, and to wring his heart afresh on his unworthy sister's account.

Still he successfully concealed his private grief in the interests of the general undertaking that was before them.

"As I understand your plan," said he, "the attempt to communicate with the mysterious inmate of the west wing must be made at once."

"At once!" said Marion. "After to-night it would be too late. It is Mr. Bernard's intention to ransack this very island by daybreak to-morrow."

"You say the west wing is securely guarded, inside and out?"

"Yes," said Marion, still further explaining the situation. "You will have to decide how to dispose of the Boomers and the dogs after we reach the spot."

"I am rather good on dogs," incidentally observed Jerry, opening and shutting one of his huge hands suggestively. "As a general thing, the fightin' sort don't admire me."

"This news about the growing disaffection among Bernard's followers is the best that is brought us," said Harold. "Any reverse that he may sustain will tend to increase it in our favor."

"That is true," said Marion. "What time is it now?"

"Past eight," said Harold, consulting his time-piece by the moonlight.

"We must start for the inlet at once," said Marion, decidedly. "We shall hardly get in view of the Burnt Tree much before nine o'clock."

Their arms and other traps had already been brought to the water's edge, and they had quickly quitted the island.

The now heavily laden boat, with Jerry at the oars, moved steadily and silently under his slow, powerful strokes.

"What is the mystery about the Burnt Tree, where these scoundrels are to assemble?" asked Harold.

"Thereby hangs a chain of legends," said Marion, with a glance at the Indian boy, who was meditatively trailing one hand in the water at the side of the boat. "Perhaps Dickey could tell you about them better than I."

Indian Dickey, who had been brought up as a devout Catholic (if he could be said to have had any bringing up at all), piously crossed himself, as he had once before done at the mention of the ill-omened spot.

"The Holy Virgin forbid!" he muttered. "It is a frightful place. I have no liking for the Burnt Tree."

Then Marion told what was known and legended of it in her own way, much to the interest of both Harold and Jerry.

"Quite romantic and very weird!" commented Harold. "But how can we know or even surmise that anything particular will happen in support of the superstition at the fateful nine o'clock of this night?"

"Something will happen," said Marion, quietly.

"But how do you know?"

"I have provided for it."

"You?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

Then, for their further astonishment and edification, she told of what she had done in connection with the ill-reputed spot.

"I couldn't have believed it," was Jerry's wondering exclamation, "if it wasn't from your own lips, miss."

"Marion, you are a simple heroine!" was all that Harold could say.

They stole stealthily in among the brooding shadows of the Holy Cross Cove, a quietly-sheltered little bay (where Indian Dickey was observed to solemnly wet his head repeatedly, as though in anticipation of the infernal arts to which he was to be subjected), and thence into the deep inlet.

Here the rocky banks soon came so close together that one of the oars had to be shipped and the other used over the stern with a sculling motion.

Still, satisfactory progress was continued.

Five minutes were still wanting to nine when they came to a break in the rocky left bank, whence a distinct view of the Burnt Tree, standing out, grim and spectral, in the bright moonlight on its stony hilltop, while their own position was still buried in the deep shadow cast by the opposite bank.

Thirty or forty men were grouped about the foot of the tree, apparently conversing with much earnestness together, their outlines being visible much less clearly.

Presently they seemed to grow motionless, and it was evident that they were impressed with the near approach of the witching hour.

At this juncture Marion leaned over to the low bank, applied a lighted match to the end of a connecting fuse that she had led to that point in the afternoon, and then quietly resumed her seat.

The fuse sparkled, fizzed along for a few inches, and then burned its way under the ground.

At this instant Indian Dickey suddenly jumped to his feet.

Fearing treachery, Harold had him promptly by the throat, with a cocked revolver at his head.

But the boy had only been stirred by superstitious excitement, without meditating any bad faith.

He sunk down sullenly into the boat when released.

"Leave me alone," he muttered. "Do you think I'm afraid of mortal terrors? The inner voice has spoken to me. I shall be dead before midnight—dead by a bullet!"

There was something startling in the quietness of his saying it.

"Nonsense, Dickey!" said Marion. "You are overwrought, to speak such absurdity."

"It is true."

"But how do you know?"

"The inner voice has spoken. I have felt the fore-pang of the bullet in my heart."

Harold, who was less impressed, signed her to leave the youth to his broodings, and all eyes were steadfastly bent in the direction of the Burnt Tree.

"Time's up," whispered the Hurricane Detective, after a pause. "The train must have had a break somewhere."

"Wait," said Marion, quietly.

"But the time's up. I can't see my watch here in the shadow, but I'm positive it is past nine."

He had hardly got out the words before there was a wondering yell from the assembled outlaws, and the entire tree seemed to start out against the sky in a weird fretwork of hissing, dazzling fire.

CHAPTER XL.

A SUPERNATURAL MANIFESTATION.

It was a ghastly and at once a beautifully impressive sight—the legended Burnt Tree thus wreathed in sparkling fire, prompt to the storied hour, and as if in full and convincing corroboration of its supernatural reputation.

The display lasted but a moment.

Then there was an explosion, apparently from somewhere in the interior of its rugged and charred old trunk, followed by the sulphurous smell of powder-smoke, and all was gloomy as before, with only the mystic moonlight yellowing and silvering over the spot.

Then there was a terrified murmur and the tramping sound of many men rushing down the hill, past the ravine, toward the lake.

"What is all that?" asked Harold.

"The band," said Marion, "are rushing for the exorcising waters of Holy Cross Cove."

"Oho! there is immunity against the threatened curse in those waters, eh?"

"Most of them think so, at all events. They must continue bathing therein until after midnight to ward off the Burnt Tree's blighting influence. Such is the superstition."

Here two men were seen running by after the crowd, cursing and swearing at them as ignoramuses and cowards.

Ere they fitted by Harold recognized them as Mr. Bernard and the pseudo Major Moreton.

"The last one there," said Harold, "is the dead-alive cashier, Redfield, you think?"

"Say that I'm sure of it," said Marion.

"But where was old Guernsey?"

"Doubtless, heading the curse-frightened fugitives. There is hardly a more credulous fool among them in this respect than he."

Here Indian Dickey, who had been on his knees in the bottom of the boat with his hands clasped, got upon his feet, with his composure in a great measure restored.

"Now is a good time for the west wing," said

he, solemnly addressing himself to Marion. "He won't be able to get a handful of the band together between now and midnight. And even then it is doubtful if he will return to the house at once."

"Good!" said Harold. "Can we turn the boat around at this point?"

"We don't go around by the inlet," explained Marion, "which would be to pass through the midst of the band, by this time swimming and splashing about in Holy Cross Cove. We must cut across country, and Indian Dickey shall be our guide. I would not be able to find the way by night."

This was accordingly done, the youth silently leading the way over the rugged, wooded country, lantern in hand, Harold and Marion coming next, and Jerry bringing up the rear, also with a lantern.

They seemed to have the solitude wholly to themselves.

Save for their rustling tread the silent loneliness of the night was unbroken.

Even the house itself, as they approached it, gave forth no flickering lamp-ray or other sign of life, and it was only as they neared the west wing that the huge bloodhounds began to set up their ferocious barking.

They extinguished their lanterns, walked around the place several times, while keeping well back in the tree-shadows, and carefully studied the grim exterior in the moonlight.

Marion had already explained as well as she could the apparent impregnability of the wing.

All eyes now instinctively turned to Jerry, whose herculean strength, allied with his cool indomitableness, seemed to constitute him as the principal actor, if not the leader, in the immediate enterprise.

He seemed to accept his tacit election to the work with his accustomed modesty.

"The man and woman in the covered way don't seem to show up," he whispered to Marion.

"Wouldn't the dogs' barking be apt to make 'em alert?"

"Not necessarily, I think. The dogs often bark at apparently nothing—at times half-through the night."

"Humph! And they—the Boomers, I mean, not the dogs—are they provided with firearms?"

"That I do not know."

"Humph! And you say that they—the dogs, I mean, not the Boomers—are not to be coaxed with pizen food?"

"They wouldn't touch the choicest food you could offer them."

"Well-trained dogs, I should say! Pity to kill 'em! Well," this half to himself, "I'll have to choke 'em."

"Wh-a-a-t!"

"Do the rest of you," he placidly continued, "walk over yonder and tempt one of the brutes sort of to one side for the length of his cable. I want to slip up on him, t'other side, sort of sly-like."

Wondering, they followed his instructions, selecting the furious animal at the end door as the first object of their experiment.

As he sprang along the side of the house at them, to the full length of his great chain, open-mouthed and bellowing, he seemed fully as big as a lion, and hardly less formidable.

Jerry had in the mean time crept up unnoticed behind, and within two or three yards of the infuriated brute.

Suddenly he sprang forward, encircling the bristling neck just back of the spiked collar with both of his immense hands.

Instantly there was a tremendous, terrifying struggle between man and brute.

Over and over they rolled in a death-grapple, but the superhuman clutch on the canine throat kept tightening slowly with the constrictive deadliness of the anaconda's coil.

The fierce animal's mouthings were hushed, but he still struggled gamely on.

Suddenly there was a tremendous twist and wrench on the part of the hands and wrists, followed by a sharp snapping sound—the snap of a broken neck—and the bloodhound was helpless on its side in the agonies of dissolution.

Jerry calmly rose to his feet.

"Let's try the next 'un," said he, in a business-like way. "I've sort o' got my hand in now."

The no less formidable dog at the side-door was similarly disposed of.

Hardly had this been effected before there was an attempt to raise the little window looking out from the covered gallery.

Jerry motioned his companions out of sight in under the shadow of the main building, and sought for himself a crouching attitude under the window.

Just then old man Boomer thrust his head and shoulders out.

He had on his head a red flannel nightcap, and held in his hands an old-time, bell-muzzled blunderbuss that would easily have accommodated half a pound of powder and a pint or two of ounce-bullets as an ordinary charge.

"Any one around?" he called out, sharply.

"We're fixed fur thieves an' trespassers here, an', by the great horn spoon, ef any cuss—"

At this juncture he was interrupted by a rising hand (Mr. Boomer subsequently admitted that he mistook it for the Hand of Providence itself, it was so large and overpowering) which incontinently shut down upon him like a giant snuffers on a sputtering tallow-dip, and the next instant he was dragged out, mute, helpless and wondering, the first human captive in the hands of the adventurous quartette.

A second followed, in the shape of the feminine Boomer, coming to the window to see what had become of her consort, and not only the mysterious west wing, but the entire Guernsey stronghold was done for.

Jerry made a modest, abdicating sort of bow to Harold, as if to intimate that his specialty was at an end, and the latter, so to speak, resumed command.

Entrance having been effected, the two remaining servants were secured, after which, as a preliminary step to the chief object of the exploration, the doors were refastened on the inside, to guard against a possible interruption from without, on the part of the enemy.

Then, with lights in abundance, they went in search of the mysterious inmate of the west wing.

Marion held her breath and felt faint, as they reached the door of the last room, in which the prisoner could be heard moving about.

Was she about to have her mother restored to her?

Harold looked at her narrowly as the door was being forced, for the key could not be found, and the Boomers were obstinate in their refusal to tell where it had been hidden away.

"Be composed, darling," he whispered. "Perhaps a disappointment is in store for you—indeed, most probably."

"In what way?" she demanded, faintly.

"The prisoner may be other than your mother. I somehow feel that it will prove so."

She made a passionately dissenting gesture.

At this moment the door yielded.

Marion sprang into the room with an anticipative cry.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MYSTERIOUS INMATE.

THEN she recoiled, faint, white and trembling.

It was a venerable and much-suffering figure—a neatly-dressed old woman, with a pitifully inquiring and thankful look in her poor eyes—that came feebly tottering toward her with outstretched hands, but Marion felt instinctively that it was *not* her mother.

She staggered and would have fallen, had not Harold caught her.

He placed her in a chair, and then induced the delivered captive to be seated, for she was also painfully excited, though giving no evidences of insanity.

"Courage, my love," said the young man in a low voice. "You have not yet found your mother; but that this is not she is no proof that she is either dead or untraceable."

The old man Boomer, who had been forced to accompany the searching-party, at this juncture burst into a mocking laugh.

"He, he, he!" he laughed, his withered carcass fairly shaking with his exulting merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at, you driveling old fool?" cried Harold, angrily. "Explain yourself, or—I sha'n't answer for the consequences to you!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He, he, he! Why, at you and Miss Marion, to be sure! You're tricked—self-tricked—to your misery. That ain't the Mrs. Bernard you expected to find here; and the fun of it is that this one is too silly to ever tell you who she is, if you should worry and question her till Doom's Day. He, he, he!"

"You shall then tell us for her," said Harold, sternly.

"Not I, by the great horn-spoon! Not I, if you should tear me to pieces with red-hot shoe-makers' pincers!"

And, in spite of threats, he proved as good as his word, though it is needless to say that he was not put to the excruciating torture he had so valiantly challenged.

He was presently silenced and disposed of by Jerry tying him together in a sort of a knot, and throwing him under a bedstead.

But now, or rather presently, a wonderful and gratifying thing happened.

The shock of her unlooked-for deliverance actually restored the prisoner to reason.

Or it should more precisely be stated that it aroused her out of the imbecility that had so long possessed her to something like a restoration of strength of mind, and, above all, of memory.

"It all comes back to me now," she said. "I seem to have been dead, and to have just come back to life. Ah, my beautiful child! so you are really the daughter of that unhappy lady whom I once looked after when she occupied my place in these strong-rooms?"

Marion was bewildered.

"You speak of my mother—of Mrs. Henry Bernard?" she asked.

"Certainly, my child; it all comes back now, wonderfully clear."

"What—what became of her?" faltered the

young girl. "Ah! do not tell me that she died!"

"Indeed, I could not tell you that, my child, for it would not be true. She did not die; she escaped."

"And was never recaptured?"

"Never."

Marion clasped her hands in silent gratitude. At least, there was a probability that her mother was still alive—that she might still be found.

At last she thought of inquiring as to the identity of the forewoman who had taken her mother's place within those miserable walls.

"But you have not told us whom you are yourself?" she cried, with a little remorseful pang. "Tell us now."

"I am old Guernsey's wife," answered the woman, with much simplicity.

"His wife."

"Yes, my dear; that is, if he hasn't taken to himself another that I know nothing of. He is hard, mean and cruel enough for anything. But God will punish him."

"He, your husband, has not done that," said Harold, sharing in the questioning in a husky voice. "So you are old Guernsey's wife, and therefore Albert Guernsey's mother?"

"Oh, yes! My mischievous little Albert! I hope you can tell me that he is still alive, sir."

"Yes, I think he is alive still," admitted Harold, hurrying over the answer. "But, tell us more: Why did your husband imprison you in Mrs. Bernard's place?"

"Because I helped her to escape. He never would forgive me."

Marion impulsively threw her arms around the poor woman's neck.

"Heaven bless you for that!" she sobbed, beginning to weep. Her warm tears gushed forth unrestrained; she pressed her lips again and again to the withered cheek.

The old woman brightened up amazingly.

"Come now, I like this!" said she. "It seems like rain in a desert. It puts me in mind of my little Albert."

Harold turned away his head, while Jerry stepped into an adjoining room, where he indulged in a string of profanity, as the only disguise possible for his overpowering emotions.

As the poor woman's faculties brightened under these softening influences, the whole history of Marion's mother's disappearance, and of her connection with the man Redfield, was elucidated, and the hours slipped away unnoticed while listening to her.

It seemed, or rather proved, that Redfield was a second cousin of the banker's wife, Moreton having been a family name on both sides.

This accounted for the apparently strange coincidence of Marion having selected it as a *nom de guerre*, no less than the "major."

Mrs. Bernard and Redfield had been playmates from childhood. The latter learned of a cousin of his, another Joel Redfield, of Bennington, Vermont, in great pecuniary distress. In fact, he was in danger of arrest for rascally embezzlement, though this was not known at the time. The cashier had always been fond of this cousin of his, and he communicated his solicitude to Mrs. Bernard, whose husband chanced to be away from home on business.

She advised her friend to go at once to his friend's assistance—indeed, in a moment of sympathetic impulse, offered to accompany him on the errand of mercy.

"It was a Saturday afternoon, after banking hours, that they took their hurried departure for Bennington, Mrs. Bernard leaving a note for her husband, explaining their destination and the object of their mission; but, just when stepping on the train a communication from the Bennington Joel was handed to the cashier, confessing the former's crime, and asking for the assistance to be brought to a certain house near Lake Falls, where the writer was in hiding."

Both the cashier and his companion were indignant at the deception which had been practiced, but they resolved to keep the appointment for the purpose of learning fuller particulars, chiefly on account of the fugitive's wife and interesting family.

Directly after boarding the train, the cashier discovered that he had a largesum of the bank's money in his possession, in addition to money of his own with which it had been his original intention to relieve his cousin's embarrassment.

But he continued on his journey, resolving to communicate with the bank president (Marion's father) the first thing on the Monday morning following. But that morning never dawned on earth for him.

The fugitive's hiding-place turned out to be old Guernsey's house. He was there secretly with its proprietor and with William Bernard. In fact, they had long been associated in the commission of crime, the Band being already an old organization.

Here, on the next Sunday night, the cashier was murdered for his money in Mrs. Bernard's presence. The shock drove her temporarily insane. Then the plot was formed and carried out of keeping her in confinement, blackening her reputation in connection with the cashier's, accomplishing the death of Marion's father, and

so on, just as it has been explained in Marion's own story in the earlier portion of this eventful narrative.

By the time these strange and elucidating facts had been obtained from Mrs. Guernsey, a new day had dawned.

Indeed, it was nearly broad day, and the listeners were suddenly aroused from their preoccupation by a howl of rage outside, which proved to be old Guernsey's over the discovery of his dead canine guardians.

Jerry was the first to step to the window of the covered gallery.

"Bernard is here, with a dozen men," said he. "If not exactly entrapped, we're at least surrounded."

"Well," said Harold, likewise showing himself at the window, "I rather think we can hold the fort."

He called to Marion, who had by this time resumed her proper habiliments, and she also came to the window.

Not only that, but Indian Dickey likewise took the opportunity of showing himself.

The combined panic and rage of both Bernard and old Guernsey passed all bounds.

"We're ruined!" was the former's first exclamation. "Our secret is out! Mrs. Bernard is in their hands!"

"No, she ain't," protested Guernsey, savagely. "Mrs. Bernard ain't a prisoner of ours—hasn't been for years."

"Wh-a-a-t!" roared the other.

His amazement sufficiently explained the systematic deception he had been the victim of on the part of his chief associate in crime.

"She escaped long ago," Guernsey went on, doggedly. "It's my own wife who has since been a prisoner there in her place."

"Scoundrel! And I have been paying you heavily for the wrong woman's detention through all these years?"

"Yes, yes! Curse it all! you'd never have been any wiser but for the treachery of that infernal boy of yours, Indian Dickey."

Mr. Bernard's wrath was terrible. He seemed about to spring at the old man's throat, but at this juncture the "major" interposed.

"Come, come, this will never do," said he. "Instead of quarreling among ourselves, shouldn't we rather kill these detective scoundrels who have outwitted us all? Storm the house!" he shouted, turning to the Band. "I myself will lead you!"

"Not much, scoundrel, for you are spoken for. I want you!"

Albert Guernsey's were the words.

He had at that instant sprung from the adjoining copse and the Bennington Joel Redfield reeled under the first stroke of the avenging knife.

CHAPTER XLII.

CLOSING SENSATIONS.

FRESH from desperate wanderings, after effecting his escape from the police detectives, Albert presented a ferocious and at the same time pitiable aspect.

His eyes were bloodshot, he was wildly haggard, and his clothes were torn and travel-stained.

"Robber of my wife and child!" he cried, aiming a second thrust at the already wounded Redfield; "this time you cannot escape me."

But the thrust was evaded, and Redfield had now drawn a revolver, a shot from which caused the would-be avenger to reel back.

A second shot finished him, and as the miserable Albert fell dead his slayer likewise sunk mortally wounded upon the ground.

"Curses on you both!" he groaned, directing his words to Bernard and Guernsey. "Would to Heaven I had never seen you! Then the cousin I helped you to murder might be alive to-day—the good woman whom we blackened and made wretched, Marion's mother, might now be happy—happy and—"

He writhed in the arms of Jabez, who had run to his assistance—then the blood gushed from his lips and all was over.

At this moment a shriek rung from the window of the covered gallery.

It was from the lips of the immeasurably unfortunate Mrs. Guernsey, who had approached the window unnoticed and had just set eyes on the dead body of her son.

As she fell fainting back Marion received her, and, with Harold's assistance, bore her away from the piteous spectacle.

The sight of all this seemed to rouse old Guernsey to madness.

"Storm the house!" he yelled, drawing a revolver and flourishing it. "Kill them all! Revenge first, explanations afterward."

Bernard imitated his example.

"That's the talk!" he shouted. "There's enough of us here to make nothing of these insolents. Storm the house at all points, but, above all, spare Miss Marion. She is mine!"

But Harold, Jerry and Indian Dickey only laughed mockingly at him from the window, and his followers to whom he had addressed himself did not move.

"What do you mean?" he shouted. "Don't you know a command when you hear it? Jabez, stir 'em up!"

But Jabez had folded his arms over his breast and was regarding both Bernard and Guernsey with a fixed look.

"This thing's about played out," said he, slowly. "If you head devils haven't got your fill of crimes and bloodshed, we have. Ain't I right, boys?"

An assenting shout from the men was his response.

"You hear that, don't you?" Jabez went on. "Well, what are you going to do about it? Add, just mark me, Bill Bernard: that revolver that you're flourishing around your head like a fool might go off. If it does, and any one around here chances to get hit, it'll be the worse for you—you just hear me!"

There was another supporting shout, and the discomfited leaders recoiled, with the ground of their power fast slipping away from under their feet.

"Come," said the Hurricane, in a low voice. "The game of these arch-villains is about up. Let us make common cause with the mutineers."

The side-door was thrown open, and Harold and Jerry stepped into the air, followed by Marion and Indian Dickey.

"Men!" cried Harold, addressing Jabez and his companions; "we are here, as you know, in the interests of right and justice. We make common cause with you, in your repentance for your misdeeds, if you say the word."

A partly assenting shout was his response, but there were also some hesitating murmurs.

"Don't listen to him!" thundered Bernard. "He would wheedle you to your ruin—to the gallows, most likely! Curse him! It is this deadly hunt of his that may ruin all."

His fury had gathered afresh, and, quick as thought, his revolver was leveled at Harold's breast.

The latter, whose pistol was yet in his hip-pocket, drew back, there was an interposing rush on the part of a slender, graceful figure, and Marion screamed.

The revolver cracked, and Indian Dickey, who had sought to interpose, received the bullet in his breast.

Bernard recoiled, half-appalled, while a horrified cry rose from the band, who were acquainted with the relations existing between the youth and the man.

Indian Dickey was being held up by Jerry, and it was evident that his hurt was mortal.

"Never mind me," said he, faintly. "It had to be—I was doomed there under the spell of the Burnt Tree—I knew it. Father, I forgive you. You were sometimes kind to me—but if you only had not been ashamed of me—Ah!"

He was gone.

Bernard steeled his heart in accordance with the emergency presenting itself.

"Men of the band, to your duty!" he yelled. "Seize these enemies, or you are lost, together with Guernsey and me, your leaders. Fools, they can bring you to the gallows, I tell you! Upon them!"

Fully half the outlaws believed what he said. They made a hesitating movement to obey.

Harold threw Marion behind him, and then Jerry and he stood on the defense, Harold pistol in hand, Jerry with his enormous fists in readiness.

But here Jabez attempted to mediate afresh.

"He lies, and he knows it!" he cried. "Men, do not listen to him! Yager and Mallock were alone his confederates in wrecking the passenger train, and they have already cut and run. He can't connect you with any murder that he and Guernsey may have reddened their hands in. Stand fast, I say. These brave men tell the truth. They represent right and justice. Stand by them, and save your bacon. That's my advice."

"Heed not the coward, but cut him down!" retorted Bernard. "It is he that lies, and you are in danger, if you do not stick but to Guernsey and me. The railroad was a natural catastrophe, as can and will be proved."

"Call on Yager and Mallock to support you," sneered Jabez. "They've cut and run, to save their own necks, leaving the guilty pair of you in the lurch."

Mr. Bernard silenced him with a passionate gesture.

He felt that his all was at stake now, as doubtless also did old Guernsey, who, standing unmoved over the body of his slaughtered son, was regarding the revolvers with a hard, defiant look.

"Lies, lies, lies!" continued the master-villain. "Men, stand by your colors—wipe these intermeddling detectives off the face of the earth—and all will yet be well!"

"Men, stand by me and the brave strangers!" reiterated Jabez. "We've followed bloody examples long enough. He to prate of personal innocence of murder—he, with Indian Dickey, his own son, dead at his feet, and by his hand!"

"It's a lie—'twas an unavoidable accident, as you all saw!" screamed Bernard. "I have never willingly shed man's or woman's blood. I call Heaven to witness the truth of my words!"

"Perjurer!" came in a stern, woman's voice

from the evergreens; "monstrous perjurer! Dare you take such an oath with me at hand to refute you?"

Bernard staggered back with a hoarse exclamation.

To the astonishment of Marion, Harold and Jerry, it was Mrs. Forsyth who now put in an unexpected appearance.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DAYBREAK.

SHE confronted Bernard and Guernsey, with her inevitable cotton sun-umbrella clutched in one hand, and with the other menacing them as implacably as the finger of fate.

If rage could be said to flash fire through the prosaic medium of blue spectacles, hers certainly did so at this moment, and they both cowered before her, though apparently without exactly knowing why.

Mr. Bernard was the first to rally.

"Yes," he retorted, huskily. "I do dare to swear that I never intentionally committed murder. Who are you that would dare to hold me forsworn?"

"Look!"

She tore off the blue goggles, her disfiguring old bonnet, her gray false front, revealing a careworn but still attractive vision of middle-aged comeliness, with yet bright eyes—fiercely-accusing eyes at this moment—and a mass of unstreaked hair tumbling down her back in picturesque profusion.

Guernsey had probably anticipated the revelation, and maintained his self-control, after a fashion; but the effect upon Bernard was remarkable. He seemed to fairly shrink up with terror, and, reeling back, with the revolver still in his hand, strove to turn away his head from what seemed to awe and repel, yet fascinate him.

"Mrs. Bernard—my half-brother's injured wife!" he faltered out, in a hollow voice, apparently not his own. "Great Heaven! does the buried past give up its ghosts to blast me?"

Marion uttered a joyful scream.

Then the separating space was crossed, and she was sobbing out her full heart in her mother's arms!

"My daughter, my precious, my own child!" murmured Mrs. Bernard, her grateful tears mingling with the young girl's. "What! and did you never suspect it?"

"Never, never!" was the sobbed reply. "Oh, and you knew it from the first?"

"Almost from the first, my child."

"Ah! why did you not tell me when I was so unhappy—when I was so hungry for your lost tenderness?"

"Hush, my love! But I do not dislike such soft chidings from you."

"My mother!"

"My precious!"

Mrs. Bernard, as we must now call her, had, in the midst of these endearments, made a sign to Harold, which he partly understood, and another in the direction of the evergreen.

The last one was now responded to by two officers who had accompanied her from New York, discovering themselves, each carrying a pair of handcuffs in one hand and a revolver in the other; and these were followed by a posse of country constables whose services had been secured at the county town, eight miles away.

But both Bernard and Guernsey, seeing that they had come to the end of their rope, had by this time come to the determination to resist to the last.

They backed against the side of the house, revolver in hand, the former still calling on such of his followers as might remain faithful to stand by them as the only hope of escaping imprisonment or the gallows in common.

The officers coolly raised their revolvers, covered the desperate men and began to advance, when an appealing gesture from the Hurricane Detective caused them to pause inquiringly.

"The game is ours by right of conquest," he treated. "Do not rob us of our rightful capture!"

With that he suddenly launched himself upon Bernard with tempestuous impetuosity, while Jerry was no less sudden in his pounce upon old Guernsey.

The two-fold assault was so sudden that the pistols of the scoundrels were dashed out of their hands before they could be discharged, and then there was a brace of grappling fights on hand for a few moments, such as had never been witnessed before, even in that adventurous region.

Harold's task was soon over, and his captive handed, helpless and gnashing his teeth, into the charge of the officers in short order.

But Jerry had a more complicated task in hand, by reason of a dozen or so of the Band making up their minds to rush to old Guernsey's assistance.

The officers would have aided the brave fellow in repelling the unequal attack, but that Harold, who knew his chum's weakness for big game, waved them back, while Jerry, sorely beset as he was, cried:

"Stand back—hands off! Don't no one dare to meddle! This is my fight! I'm the champion of the Harlem water-front, and a whole raft-

load of such galoots as these ain't no more to me than—"

No more was heard as he disappeared for an instant under the struggling heap of his assailants; but when he suddenly emerged, shaking them off as a lion would the dew-drops from his mane, he had old Guernsey and another of the scoundrels by the ankle in either hand, and, with their bodies as bludgeons, straightway began such a novel and terrific Indian-club exercise among his remaining assailants as speedily made nothing of them.

It was over at last.

"Thanks, gentlemen," said he, modestly tossing an animated but sorely-battered 'club' apiece to each of the New York officials, after which he calmly wiped his perspiring brow. "I may have been a little previous in my insistence on non-interference, but then I do like an unmixed free-fight occasionally. It sort of limbers out a feller's joints."

A number of other discriminating arrests were made, the house and its inmates were placed in charge of a constable, and the long quest of the Hurricane Detective and his stalwart chum was at an end.

But there was one of the inmates of that ill-omened house who was fortunately—we say it earnestly—beyond being taken charge of and beyond all further troubles, sufferings and distresses that had so largely been her portion.

We allude to the poor prisoner of the west wing. She was found to have died in the faint into which she had fallen upon witnessing the freshly-slain body of her once-idolized but unworthy son.

"Poor heart!" murmured Marion, standing beside the remains. "Perhaps it is far better so."

Mrs. Bernard imprinted a kiss upon the lifeless brow.

"She was my friend in need—she sacrificed herself for me!" she murmured. "Yes, Marion, you are right. She had nothing left to live for, and Heaven will take care of its own. It is far better so."

The end of our eventful story is come.

William Bernard committed suicide in prison before he could be brought to trial for his numberless misdeeds. But he was considerate enough to leave a written confession behind him, in which he fully avowed, among other crimes, his instigation of the railroad-massacre, the attempt to destroy the freight-car and inmates, the murder of the cashier, Joel Redfield, the plot in connection with Marion and her mother for the felonious possession of the great Bernard estate, and the methods by which he had so long hoodwinked the inhabitants of Richburg while secretly pursuing his scarcely paralleled career of secret violence and criminality.

Old Guernsey was brought to trial, convicted of numerous startling charges, including that of murder, and received a life-sentence in State Prison.

Eight lesser members of the band were brought to conviction for engaging in organized robbery, and received lighter sentences; Jabez and several others earning an immunity from prosecution through turning State's evidence.

Yager and Mallock were never captured.

Marion and Harold were happily married on the following twelfth of October, which was the beautiful bride's twenty-first birthday.

They are rich, charitable, and happy beyond conception.

But one child has been born to them thus far, a lovely little baby girl, rejoicing in the mother's own name—Marion; but their household is also brightened by a little boy of five or six, who has become a charming child, and who cannot do enough for his adoptive baby sister.

They always address him as 'Genie, or Eugene; but he is none the less identical with the odd little Snipsey of our history.

His unprincipled mother, fortunately for all concerned, died of an epidemic shortly after learning of the tragic death of her husband and admirer, and it was at Marion's sweet request that the child was adopted by Harold as his own.

Mrs. Bernard and Mrs. Harcourt, who are of about the same age, have hit it so well and sympathetically together that they are keeping house in common in the old residence in West Thirty-ninth street. Though both widows are still of a marriageable age, and with no inconsiderable charms, it is not likely that either will ever enter the state of wedlock again. They are too happy in each other, and in the lives of their wedded dear ones, to think of anything else; and when not visiting them at their elegant Harlem home, are finding unlimited enjoyment of each other's society and the comfortable domain of well-to-do old ladyhood as it slowly overtakes them down the pathway of time.

One frequent visitor at the Harlem household is honest Jerry Cleaver, who has so far conquered his hopeless attachment that rumor already has him engaged to the buxom and highly appreciative daughter and sole heiress of a wealthy builder in the Annexed District.

At all events, he does not deny the soft impeachment when made, and there is no denying that both Tom Cleaver and he have forsaken

boat-building for house-building. They have been taken into partnership by the aforesaid wealthy builder—with an abundance of capital, said to have been supplied, unasked, by Harold and Marion—and are rapidly acquiring money, respectability, and, let us hope, enduring happiness, much to the Widow Cleaver's satisfaction and pride.

THE END.

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